CONCERT PITCH

FRANK DANBY

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CONCERT PITCH

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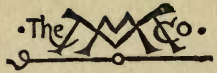

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CONCERT PITCH

BY

FRANK DANBY, pseud.

AUTHOR OF "THE HEART OF A CHILD,"
"PIGS IN CLOVER," ETC.

Julia (Davis) Frankau

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CONCERT PITCH

CHAPTER I

WHEN Sir Hubert and Lady Wagner bought and practically rebuilt Stone House, Piccadilly, their position in Society was already established. After Lady Sallust took them up, they had rented the family mansion of the Lyssons in St. James's Square for three seasons. But, naturally, no furnished house, however dignified, could roof their ambitions indefinitely. An imposing place of their own was essential, with at least two country estates, a yacht and racing stables.

They learned their requirements slowly. The days seemed now very remote when Lœtitia thought Kensington Palace Gardens was a distinguished address, but it was really only eight years since she and her husband had come home from South Africa with a million or so of money, her two stepchildren, and their social way to make. She relied then on her connection with the Briarleys and her pleasing manners—manners that had helped her to earn a living in days even more remote, before she had met the mining magnate. She still retained her, so to speak, professional manner and the photographic smile that went with it, but she had discarded the Briarleys. She knew now that even the head of the family, Sir Jabez Briarley himself, was of no moment or interest in the world that held the Sallusts. She shook off the Briarleys

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as one shakes fleas from a blanket. It was ridiculous to think of considering their feelings. Lœtitia had, as she always assured her friends, a great sense of duty. She would not have been doing her duty to her husband, his children, and the great position they had all attained if she included any of her relations in the new visiting-list of Stone House.

"You agree with me, don't you, dear Lady Sallust, they would be incongruous, painfully incongruous, it would be fair neither to us nor to them, they would be uncomfortable. . . ."

Of course, Lady Sallust agreed with her. Lady Sallust knew nothing about the many kindnesses the Briarleys had shown Lœtitia in her poor and humble days. All Lady Sallust knew was that the Wagners were diabolically rich and the political party for which she stood was in need of money. She agreed that Lady Wagner—for a baronetcy was the outward sign that the Wagner wealth had flowed into some, at least, of the right channels—was quite right in discarding relations, friends, or acquaintances who might impede her upward flight. Lady Sallust did not even combat openly Lady Wagner's hint that Sir Hubert's daughter, her own stepdaughter, might aspire to a duke. Stone House had been acquired from the Banffs, and Calingford, the heir, although in his fortieth year, was still a bachelor. Afterwards Lœtitia said that it was upon Lady Sallust's advice she sent for Manuella before her education was complete, in order that the introduction to Calingford might be effected quickly. There were rumours already that this interesting nobleman had begun to see the error of his ways and his musical comedy *amourettes,* and was on the look-out for a suitable alliance.

It was eminently appropriate that the first season of the Wagners at Stone House should be inaugurated by the coming-out of a daughter, and a series of entertainments with a grand wedding as a probable climax. For so mean a soul Lœtitia's aspirations were strangely lofty. Lady Sallust never ceased to marvel at her, to relate

stories about her; but she kept to the unwritten terms of their strange alliance, and, with certain reservations, helped her consistently to soar to the empyrean heights of her dreams.

She explained the position frankly to her nephew, Waldo, Earl of Lyssons, just home from East Africa, newly come to the family honours and incongruous in them.

"The Wagners represent everything that we want least, and need most. The man is fairly possible; there are always people who will talk diet and drugs with him, he is only really interested in his liver. The woman is . . . *well,* you saw for yourself. But one must do something for one's country. We can't all break windows. I know you are wondering why I sent you in to dinner with her last night."

Lady Sallust had a way of saying two or three things at the same time, and was sometimes difficult to follow.

"Lœtitia Wagner wanted to get into Society, but she went all the wrong way about it. Charity bazaars and that sort of thing. I did not know when I first met them how amazingly rich they were. Afterwards, when I made them take your house in St. James's Square at an exorbitant rent, I felt it my duty to do something for them in return. Oh! my dear boy, believe me, things have altered since you were last home. We have been out of office for seven years! Think of it, and things going from bad to worse all the time. But first I must tell you that Hubert Wagner contributed fifty thousand pounds to the expenses of the last election. He built and endowed a new wing for the County Hospital at North Leven, gave ten thousand pounds for a park, and presented a drinking fountain. And then we had only a majority of fifteen! We are bound to receive them, to make much of them. Do speak, Waldo; don't sit there looking so tall and enigmatic and . . . and disappointing. If the Wagners had not rented the house in St. James's Square, you would owe six thousand pounds more."

"What are these Wagners, then? How did they acquire their enormous wealth?"

He spoke indifferently, playing with the little dog that rolled and leaped beside him like a kitten; it was a Pekingese, only second to himself in his aunt's affections.

"How does anybody know? What does it matter? His father was a small tobacco-planter, I have been told, in Cuba, Havana, or somewhere, and this man ran away with a neighbouring planter's daughter. Fortunately he was inspired to go to South Africa, and it was in the good days when everybody made fortunes. Of course, they say he began by illicit diamond buying."

"You don't mean to tell me the woman I took in to dinner last night ever found anyone to run away with her!"

Lady Sallust laughed.

"No! I can't imagine anyone running away with Lœtitia. She is his second wife. She was governess to his children after their own mother died."

"A governess! That accounts for it. I thought she had an educational manner. She put me through quite a stiff examination, and, I believe, ploughed me! I haven't been to the Academy, nor to any of the theatres she talked about. I did not dine with the Duke of Glastonbury last week, and I forget where I spent Easter. Why on earth did you make me take her in to dinner? Did you think I wanted disciplining, that, back of beyond, I had become a savage? Heavens! What a typical stepmother! She might have come out of a book. Are they boys or girls? Poor brats!"

He was fond of his aunt. To make light love to her was his way of showing it. And at fifty-seven a woman likes being made love to, however lightly, for vanity dies more slowly than sex.

"Why did you make me take her in to dinner?" he repeated. Now he lifted Curio on to his knee, toying with its ears, talking to it, as the little creature looked up at him with bright, fascinated eyes.

"She was a bad aunt, wasn't she, Curio? A bad

cruel aunt, and we very nearly didn't call upon her this afternoon, although she ordered us to do so imperiously. We don't like being neglected by our relations, and cross-examined by tight-lipped females, do we, Curio?"

"My dear boy, do be serious. Leave off talking rubbish; put Curio down, you are mesmerizing him. He will begin to answer you in a moment; look at his eyes! I really want to talk to you. Yes; it is about the Wagners. Why don't you guess? I cannot make out how it is you are so unlike other young men of your age . . . any other young man would have guessed by now."

"I am thirty-four, auntie dear, not nearly so young as you. I have lost all my illusions, whilst you still believe in the Conservative party! You are *ingénue,* a positive *ingénue,* compared to me."

"It is a pity you have been out of England so many years, that you are so out of touch with affairs."

"Affairs of the heart! What have you to tell me?"

In mock dismay he deposited the dog carefully on her lap, changing his seat to one beside her on the sofa.

"Tell me all about it. What have you done?"

She laughed at him and patted his hand, and told him not to be absurd; played the little interlude, and then got to her theme again. He should have been her son. When she might have had children she had been too much occupied; now she was sometimes sorry it had been so.

"Did you never think it possible that you would inherit? Did no one ever think of it for you?"

Waldo, twentieth Earl of Lyssons, screwed his glass into his eye, settled himself more comfortably among the cushions in the corner of the sofa, and gave the question his consideration.

"I believe my father did mention it once or twice when I was home seven or eight years ago, and again in his letters. He was always an optimist, and had never got on well with my bachelor uncles. When Uncle Ian died, and Wyndham, he wrote to me. It was then I got lost. . . ."

He lost himself again in dreamland for a moment. For years he had been wandering in waste spaces, in desert and jungle; what women-folk he knew he had never taken seriously. It was only outside confidences he would give his aunt.

"When I went away first, there were eight lives between me and my grandfather," he said, when he came back to the occasion.

"There were only three when you returned from Nigeria."

"Three such good lives," he pleaded, "and possibilities of more."

"But you ought to have thought . . ."

"Of the discomforts of dead men's shoes, of how badly they would fit me? Dear aunt, you surely don't mean it." His tone was still light.

"Eight lives in ten years, and estate duty to be paid on every one of them! That is the point—the point I am trying to make you see."

They were in that luxurious, flower-filled drawing-room in Grosvenor Square. Although it was winter, the room was full of roses, lilies-of-the-valley, mauve and yellow orchids. From the walls great grandmothers, great-aunts and far-off cousins, painted by Reynolds, Gainsborough and Lawrence, looked down upon their conference. There was priceless china on the mantelpiece and in corner cupboards. Lady Sallust had been a Treford. There were vitrines full of Treford miniatures, some as early as Hilliard and Isaac Oliver. Lady Sallust herself suggested nothing of the quiet pictorial repose of an old miniature, she was anxious-faced, well dressed and ultra-modern in manner. But this was an affectation; she was really a survival or return to type, a great lady who had to stoop to reach to-day, and did it strenuously.

"You bring me back to whence I started." She laid her hand, with its old-fashioned rings, upon his knee; the Trefords had always been celebrated for the beauty of their hands. "You have not talked openly to me,

but your uncle has. You are in great financial difficulties, actually in debt. . . ."

That it was true made it the more ridiculous; he was up to the neck in debt, although never in his life had he willingly contracted an obligation he was unable to fulfil.

"There is only one way out of it—one possible way. You must marry money; you owe it to the family." He moved uneasily, then he laughed.

"Go on," he said, "I leave myself entirely in your hands—your handsome hands." He raised the one on his knee and kissed it. "I suppose you have decided whose money I am to marry? Who is the lucky girl? Or is she a widow?"

"Sir Hubert Wagner's daughter," Lady Sallust answered immediately, quickly, irrevocably. She had evidently been over it all in her own mind, not once, but many times. "Sir Hubert will give her a million of money, a million of money!" she repeated. "I have it direct from Lœtitia—if the girl marries to please them, of course. I thought of you directly I heard it. Their own idea is Calingford; they bought Stone House from the Duke, you know, and the scheme came into their heads at once. The Duke is almost an invalid; it cannot be long before Calingford succeeds. Lœtitia already thinks of the girl as the future Duchess; I can see it in her eyes. They are sending for her to come home immediately, although I believe her education is not finished, and she is not yet eighteen. Waldo . . ."

It was evident that if Lœtitia had set her heart on a ducal alliance, Lady Sallust was equally desirous that the girl should become a Countess.

"Waldo, tell me I may speak to them about you, and open negotiations. I have let her talk to me about Calingford, but it would be easy, comparatively easy, to make her see the difference in your quarterings. A million of money, Waldo! There is no one at all in our set with anything like it. I don't want you to have to go to America for a wife." She was really pleading with him, and he was touched by her interest, by her affection.

Waldo, Lord Lyssons, with whom so much of this story is concerned, had recently inherited one of the oldest titles in the United Kingdom and the lands that went with it. A series of accidents had placed him in the position he found at present so unenviable. A younger son of a younger son, the obscurest cadet of this ancient house, he had been called to fulfil duties for which he had no inclination, recalled to a civilization the formula of which he had almost forgotten. Heirs-presumptive and heirs-collateral had died incontinently. They had gone down in the *Amazon,* been lost in the *Waratah,* broken their necks in military steeplechases, made fatal experiments with aeroplanes, contracted typhoid and encouraged consumption. It seemed now that all he had inherited was the claims of the Inland Revenue, a bewilderment of Land Taxes and unsettled Death Duties. His forebears had held a castle against Henry I. in 1118; it was doubtful if their unworthy descendant would hold anything at all against the piratical performances of a Radical Chancellor of the Exchequer. He had heard of nothing but claims, claims, claims. All these weeks since his return he had lived in dusty lawyers' offices, learning his difficulties. Now he sat in Lady Sallust's drawing-room in Grosvenor Square, and was told them over again.

But the suggestion his aunt made him, and made so solemnly, went further than anything the lawyers had proposed. Lady Sallust challenged his personal freedom, the prerogative of his manhood. He could not treat her proposal seriously, for seriousness was not his conversational note.

"Is it quite fair on the girl, even if you do succeed in persuading that stupendous stepmother of hers to lower her pretensions? You must think of that, my dear aunt. A duchess is . . . well, you know a duchess is always a duchess."

"I believe you are laughing. It is no laughing matter. Cuthbert says something must be done, and done quickly." She could not have been more in earnest. Cuthbert, who, by the way, was Lord Sallust, once a Cabinet Min-

ister and always an important figure in English political life, had impressed upon her the seriousness of the position. "The Inland Revenue people have been very lenient, he says, but you will have to settle with them sooner or later."

She had not an idea how little impression she was making upon this incomprehensible nephew of hers.

"Cuthbert says everything is mortgaged that *can* be mortgaged," she urged.

"More" he answered with cheerful acquiescence, "ever so much more. I never cease wondering how they did it."

"And you agree with me that there is only one way out."

"To become a Wagnerite."

"She may be a very nice girl."

"She may!"

"And I would help you with her."

"Me! Do I want help? Has it gone as far as that?"

"Don't, Waldo! don't jest. This is really a critical moment. She is to be presented at the very first Court. You know how desperately hard up the Banffs are; they won't lose any time."

"It is to be a race, then, between Calingford and me. And the girl, the hare,—isn't she to have any start?"

"Don't be exasperating. It is what girls expect—to be run after."

"I know," he persisted; "but she ought to have a fair start. Now, here you are, you dear ladies, laying the scent, putting our noses to it, showing us the trail, whoo-hooping us away." He shook his head with mock solemnity. "No! I don't think it fair. Put me down as having scratched."

"You are really perverse. It is a girl and not a hare; they hunt, if they are not hunted. You ought to know that. Why shouldn't she fall in love with you? You are much nicer and better-looking than Calingford."

"Oh! that is quite another question. You never mentioned that."

There was a carved and gilded Chippendale mirror on

the wall between the pictures. He walked over to it and regarded himself deliberately.

"You are sure you are not going beyond your brief, that she will be given a run?"

Lady Sallust had not a keen sense of humour. Waldo was exasperating, but, of course, he must at least be as well aware as she of the seriousness of his position. Looking at him as he posed before the looking-glass a little dramatically for her benefit, she thought, if the choice were given to her, the girl would certainly prefer him to Lord Calingford, even if she knew nothing of the reputation of either of them.

The new Earl of Lyssons was very tall, if rather too thin; he had black hair that would not be smooth, and an eyeglass which, since it never kept in its place, made him appear restless and not very wise. He was for ever taking it off and putting it on again; it fitted badly, and, as he tried to screw it in for greater safety, it made a red mark, and his indeterminate features, soft and plastic, went awry and out of drawing. He had a habit of saying things without any apparent meaning. Lady Sallust sometimes thought he was very clever and very deep, and might be a great force; whilst at other times she wavered, and doubted if he were completely sane, if he were "all there." She admitted that, although she had always been fond of him, she was unable to understand him.

Now he stood before the glass and pretended to doubt whether Manuella Wagner would look upon him favourably! What was the use of disregarding first principles? Wavering as to his complete sanity, Lady Sallust assured him that very young girls were not, as a rule, hard to please, they fell in love with the first man who paid them any attention.

"And if you are backed up by her people, other men kept at a distance . . ." Then, hesitating at something whimsical or laughing in his eyes, she went on even more firmly to impress upon him the desperate nature of his affairs, about which all their world was talking,

and this easy way of righting them. Finally, when tea was brought in, and he was feeding Curio with sweet cake, having ceased apparently to take any interest in the conversation, she took it for granted that she had secured his acquiescence and might take steps towards accomplishing her design.

He did not really care what she thought or did. She could not marry him against his will. He rallied her that she occupied herself with such trivial things as party politics and the preservation of his estates. He parried her more definite questions, paying her compliments and persuading her anew that no one could be more agreeable than this nephew of hers when he was in the mood. She thought no girl could resist him; certainly no young girl. Already she saw herself carelessly mentioning Waldo's quarterings, comparing them with the Duke's more recent creation, convincing Lady Wagner of the superiority of such an alliance. Of course she would call it "an alliance" and not a marriage; that would suit Lœtitia.

"Isn't the whole idea rather French? I feel like Rip Van Winkle. I have come back to a world I don't understand. Are things done like this nowadays? When we read 'A marriage has been arranged . . .' does it really mean it has been settled without the intervention of the principals?"

"Lœtitia is sure to be able to influence the girl when I have influenced *her*," she said confidently. "You will find we shall make everything easy for you. I only wanted to know that you would fall in with my plan."

He laughed again, he really could not help it; she took everything for granted so easily.

"You will admit, even from the little you saw of the mother last night, that she is not the sort of woman a girl would like to live with, or prefer to a good marriage and a position of her own."

"I admit, dear aunt, I most freely admit, a girl might dare anything rather than live with that charming lady with whom you sent me in to dinner. But . . ."

There was, however, really no use in arguing; the whole thing was too ridiculous.

He went away quite soon, leaving Lady Sallust still under the erroneous impression that he had assented to what she proposed. He even thanked her for taking so much trouble.

"I won't commit myself until I have seen her; you must not commit me. I am a little slow. You carry me away by your goodness. What a pity aunts are within the prohibited degree. . . ."

She had even to defend herself laughingly against him, and to tell him again he was "absurd."

But when the door of the Grosvenor Square house had closed behind him and he was in the street, he thought it was not he, but she, who was absurd, and so was all the civilization in which he found himself. He had as little intention of marrying the daughter of Sir Hubert and Lady Wagner as he had of trying to raise the *Titanic*, perhaps less. Whichever way he might find out of his difficulties, it would not be this one. He had hunted big game, known the hardships of exploration and its joys, looked for and found adventure. Blackwater fever in Nigeria, and several forms of malaria in Nyassa and Somaliland had been among his experiences; he had been tended by women of all nations. His constitution and his morality were nevertheless unimpaired; he was really extraordinarily sane although at the moment a little out of his bearings. For he was not without the knowledge that it was a great name, with a great tradition, to which he had succeeded, not without a certain pride in record and lineage. If he was not yet clear as to how he was to tackle the difficulties of his position and his amazing poverty, he never doubted his capacity. He wanted no girl's hand to cut the Gordian knot for him, he would find his own way out.

So he thought as he left Grosvenor Square that afternoon, never dreaming that there were forces with which he had forgotten to reckon, and complications that no man could foresee. He sent a telegram to Lady Sallust

a few days later. He told her it was unfortunately impossible for him "to make an inspection of the auriferous property" she recommended, as he was leaving England. He also wrote her a short note:

"My dear Aunt,

"I have been thinking over all you said, all you so wisely said. Alas! my affections are too deeply engaged. Sweet seventeen is not for me, who find my distraction in maturer charms. Pity me, love me a little if you can, but don't, I implore you, don't try and set me hunting hares. Lady Wagner's daughter is foredoomed to be a Duchess, I feel it. It is Calingford must satisfy those inquisitorial cold eyes. I should run away on the eve of my wedding. I am running away now, you are driving me from London. I believe I am frightened of the fate you suggest for me.

"Your enamoured nephew,

"Waldo."

Yet once or twice after he had written his letter he caught himself wondering if any girl could be found to accept Calingford—any young girl. He was thinking about Calingford whilst his aunt was talking. They had been at Eton together. Unless Calingford had altered very considerably, he pitied any woman who might associate herself with him. He did not know Sir Hubert Wagner's daughter, but he was even uncomfortable, and had a strange quixotic irrational moment of remorse at having refused to marry her himself when he thought she might be thrown at Calingford's head—and heart—and never know what a head it was, and what a heart.

A very curious fellow this Lord Lyssons, hardly fit to take his place amongst ordinary men and women.

CHAPTER II

LORD LYSSONS, in order to give at least some colour to his letter to his aunt, actually went to Paris. He did not know that the first Court was six weeks distant, and he had forgotten that the bride intended for him was still at school.

Manuella Wagner had been a very troublesome child, and all her stepmother's early experience in dealing with refractory children proved of little use with her stepdaughter. There were constant collisions, and there is no doubt the girl left a bad impression on Lady Wagner's mind. She had been banished to foreign schools for some seven or eight years now, and the impression had had time to fade. The moment had arrived, too, when she was needed to take her part in the family scheme of greatness. Lady Wagner often talked of her duty, and perhaps did it according to her lights. She meant to do her duty by Manuella, and hoped that the girl, now she was grown up and able to think logically, would be easier to manage. Lady Wagner thought, too, that now she could deal with her better. Her amazing belief in herself gained fresh strength with every emblazoned carriage or motor that pulled up at Stone House. Manuella would show gratitude for the settlement her father was prepared to make on her and the kindness Lœtitia was prepared to show her by falling in with their plans, and doing her share in establishing the permanence of the

family position. Lœtitia did not doubt that the most refractory head would bend to strawberry leaves. A certain amount of coaching and clothing would, of course, be necessary before the girl could be introduced. But there were six weeks for preparation.

Lord Lyssons remained a month in Paris in order to avoid argument with his aunt and the attentions of Somerset House. As it happened, he returned upon the same day as Manuella, and in the same train. In fact he had avoided nothing, as the event proved, but a very foggy February in London.

He had not forgotten Lady Sallust's importunity. Several times he thought what an extraordinary idea it had been, and wondered about the girl and Calingford, and whether she had accepted him. He had been out of England so many years that times and seasons meant little to him. He never pictured Manuella still at the finishing school, and Lœtitia putting off sending for her till the last minute, nor dreamed that he was running back, not only into, but with, the very danger from which he had fled!

There had been no talk of any Wagner issue but the proffered bride. Lord Lyssons was unconscious of the very existence of the brother, Albert Edward Wagner. But all the way from Paris to Calais he was amused by the conversation between a boy and girl who occupied the same carriage and talked with complete unrestraint, under the impression evidently that the tall man in the corner was some sort of a foreigner, who did not understand their language.

Manuella was finishing her education at Fontainebleau when Albert unexpectedly came to fetch her. Lœtitia considered neither the girl's feelings nor those of the Principal of the school. She may have always intended that the girl should come back before she was eighteen, but she had given no such indication. Manuella looked forward to at least six months more freedom. Compared with Lœtitia's rule, her school life had been freedom. Now here was Albert with the peremptory

order. It could hardly be called a summons *home*, for there was not enough warmth in Lady Wagner to kindle a hearth or make an atmosphere of homeliness. She was a stranger to her stepdaughter, but one around whom no romance lingered. "Mother" was a word in Manuella's vocabulary that implied a cold eye, pinched thin lips, and implacable tyranny. It snubbed and denied. Lœtitia's "pleasing manner," Lady Wagner's "social charm" were not exhibited in the nursery or schoolroom. "Children must be seen and not heard" was a phrase that embodied her, echoing in the child's ears from the early South African days; repeated on the steamer, in chilly foreign hotels, at the big house in Kensington from which the child had gone to her years in foreign schools. All she knew of care or tenderness was epitomized in it. Such newer associations as she had with her stepmother were letters that forbade this or that; "pi" letters that preached and dogmatized, letters which had been a duty to write, and were a yet more distasteful duty to answer.

Lord Lyssons, listening in his corner of the railway carriage, heard all about it, although he did not know who were the young people talking. The boy was a typical English undergraduate, knowing no word of the language of the country in which he was traveling; he shouted at the guards and grumbled at their stupidity in not speaking English; a foolish youngster whose insularity was his only excuse.

"Can't you tell that infernal fool that I want my handbag in here. I've shouted at him till I'm hoarse."

The girl spoke good French, but she seemed almost as cross as her brother. They took some time settling themselves. The train was fairly started before all the bags and handbags, hat-boxes and papers gathered about them were properly stowed away. Then the intimate talk began. The girl was ill-dressed for travelling, wearing a red-striped flannel blouse with a turn-down collar, a blue serge skirt, and a burnt-straw hat. But the costume suited her, and there was no doubt of her beauty.

It was of a foreign type, the general impression Lord Lyssons got was of ivory skin, a thin carmine mouth, mutinous and mobile, resentful dark eyes, thickly fringed, and a petulant rich voice, with strange low, passionate notes. Most of the time she talked she was in such a palpable rage, so bad-tempered, that Waldo was amused. She looked like a child in her short skirts, although the blouse hinted that she was a well-developed one.

"I know she only sent for me because she knew I wanted to stay where I was," she began, when her brother had at last made himself comfortable and given her a chance of speaking of anything but the peccadilloes of the guard and porters.

"I'm not going to ask that Johnny in the corner if he minds smoke. If he says anything to me I shall pretend not to understand."

"Only it won't be pretence," she put in hastily. Then she smiled, she had not meant to be nasty to Albert; it was not his fault that he was here. When she smiled Waldo was confirmed in his impression that she was very beautiful. But the smile was only momentary, her sense of injury was uppermost.

"What does she want me home for? I was getting on with everybody. It was the jolliest place I've ever been in. I wanted to stay."

"You've been saying nothing else ever since I came over. What's the good of arguing? You had to come; there is no good fighting her. Haven't we tried it often enough? She's got the Governor on a string."

They had tried, over and over again, in tempestuous childhood, and always been worsted. Their father never interfered on their behalf, and Lœtitia had quite a collection of spirit-breaking punishments always on hand. She had succeeded with Albert, but Manuella persistently defied her. That was why, when Albert went to Eton, Manuella was banished to Germany.

"They did without me well enough when I was miserable in that squabbling Dusseldorf family, and in that beastly convent in Brussels. I believe it's only because

I wrote that I loved Fontainebleau she is taking me away from it."

"I say, draw it a bit milder. Steppie has her points. She has done a lot for us all."

"She has done nothing for me!" The answer was quite vicious. "Thank Heaven I have only seen her five times in seven years, and then it was only because they were somewhere near and would have felt ashamed not to pay me a visit."

"I say, if you're coming home in that spirit there will be ructions. Can't you manage to simmer down a bit? Anyway, you are past bread-and-water days and being locked up. I should make up my mind to play the amiable if I were you, it pays ever so much better."

"Oh, yes," she said contemptuously, "of course you would."

Albert had always truckled. But then she remembered she was very fond of Albert. He was all she had ever had to care for, and, although he had played her false so many times, disappointed her, and given in to authority, she felt her heart warming to him.

"Are you going to be at home?"

"Not when I can help it, but I'll give you a start. I can generally get down for a few days if there's anything going on."

"She will come in when we want to talk, and interfere with everything, just like she used."

"You're as bad-tempered as ever, I do believe."

"I wasn't bad-tempered at Fontainebleau, nor at Dresden. It's the thought of going back that puts me into such a rage. You oughtn't to find fault with me. You hated it all as much as I did. We were never allowed to do anything we wanted."

"Everything is altered. I'm sure you'll get on better with them now. They're big pots, you know. The Governor is going to get a peerage. He stood for every sort of place that never returns a Conservative before he got in for North Leven. We've got to be in the show; don't make a fuss, there's a good girl. We'll

have some fun together, just you and I, like old times. I've been beastly dull without you. I didn't tell you in my letters. I hated Eton, never got on there, got into no end of rows. I'm sick to death of Oxford, though of course it's better than Eton. The Governor means well, you know, if he wasn't so under her thumb. I get quite a decent allowance. She likes me to bring men home, or to Gairoch. I hate doing it, because she questions me about their fathers and mothers, and chips me about my low tastes if they ain't swells. You've got to be presented. I think there's an idea of marrying you out of hand."

"I'd like to see them doing it."

"Well, I heard the Mater say something about it, and that she hoped you had altered. I think you're on the good-looking side now, whatever you were as a kid. But of course you want decent clothes; in that get-up you look as if you ought to have a hurdy-gurdy . . ."

She was impatient of his criticism and indifferent as to her appearance, a crude young creature, all dark eyes and resentment. There was something wild and untamed about her that appealed to the listener in the corner. She was being led back into captivity, evidently that was what she felt. It was strange that her identity never struck him.

"Oh! don't bother about my looks. I don't want to come out, or to be married, or any of these things."

"What do you want to do? You can't stay at school for ever. I wonder you're not sick of it."

She hesitated to tell him what she wanted to do, although hesitation seemed no part of her. It set Waldo wondering; he listened for what she would say next. He had a book, a yellow-covered novel by Willy, but he was really only listening. Manuella's hesitation lasted quite a long time. Albert had always been leaky, and she was not quite sure of herself, nor of her power. She could not bear criticism, and ridicule was unthinkable. She knew what she wanted to do, but she did not know if she were capable of doing it. In six months more

she would have known, if the beastly summons had not come. She was in utter rebellion.

There was no use telling Albert that she wanted to be an operatic singer. Monsieur Lausan had said her voice was unique, that it had only to gain power, and she had only to acquire dramatic capacity, expression. . . . What was the use of telling Albert? He might laugh.

Albert did not press the question as to what she did want, and why she resented so bitterly having to come home and be presented and do all the things other girls did. He had a great deal to say about himself, about his popularity, and the jolly fellows he knew but was not allowed to take home because their people didn't amount to anything. He spoke of cousins who had been dropped, and there were exclamations from the girl of dismay and more defiance.

"I shall go and see Susie Briarley, whatever happens. I don't care how grand we are supposed to be. I'm not grand; I'm not going to be a snob. I liked all the Briarleys."

She said this, and he told her she would have to look out for herself; he wasn't going to run counter to his stepmother, who really held the purse-strings and everything else. He didn't mind what he did on the quiet, but he hated a fuss. He did not press her as to what were her own desires and ambitions, and only Waldo was interested. Why did she not want to come out or to be married? But of course she was too young to know her own mind. Still, he wondered what wild idea she harboured.

He saw her again on the boat. Albert showed early signs of sea-sickness and disappeared into a cabin. Manuella stayed on the deck, leaning over the taffrail, watching the slow retreat of the shore, then, when it was out of sight, the waves that broke against the side of the boat. The sky was lowering and the waves high, crested with foam. She watched them, and Lord Lyssons watched her. The mutiny and the rebellion went out of

her face now that she was alone. Waldo thought there was something wistful in it. She took her hat off when the wind tore at it, swinging it freely in her hand, whilst her hair was blown this way and that. She was really only a child; either her skirts were short, or she had outgrown them. The wind blew away the wistfulness and melancholy, light came into her eyes and colour into her cheeks, the mouth relaxing into the softest of smiling curves.

As he was standing near her he spoke:

"You are enjoying the storm?" he asked.

"Rather!"

She did not resent being spoken to; it was obvious that it did not appear anything out of the way to her, that he had no young-ladyish scruples to overcome. "I wish it was rougher. I would love to see the waves come over the deck. They look as if they are going to, don't they? How they break! What a noise!" They could hardly hear themselves speaking.

"It doesn't make you ill?"

"Oh, no! It makes me feel awfully well—the salt of it, the tang. When I lean over it comes up into my face."

She leant over again as she spoke, and he could see that the spray of the waves, as they broke against the side of the boat, did really wet her cheeks. She rubbed them to show him, and her ungloved hands were wet. Her cheeks flushed with the pleasure and excitement of the storm; now they were as a rose, and the dark eyes aglow under the thick tangled lashes. He cannot be said to have entered into conversation with her, for, as her stepmother said quite truly, Manuella never had the art of conversation; but he went on shouting to her and she to him. There was not a trace of embarrassment about her, or missishness.

"I love water—rivers, sea, falls. Do you know the Falls in Rhodesia? People say they are better than Niagara. I went there when I was ten years old. We camped out. Such skies and sunrises, and then the

Falls! I don't wonder Rhodes wanted to be near them, do you?"

He did not correct her topography. It was really a storm, and now the sea-spray jewelled her dark hair, and between the wind and sea they shouted at each other.

"You come from South Africa?" he asked her, when there was a lull.

"Ever so long ago. Since then I've never seen a real sea. It was an awfully stormy time when we came over. Mother and Albert were sick all the time, and I ran wild about the deck. I loved every moment of it."

Then she was silent; he even thought she sighed impatiently, as if the end of the running wild had been the end of her happy time. When he could make himself heard, he told her of the seas he had traversed—equinoxes, great gales in Southern seas. He caught her interest, and when he suggested they should get into shelter, for now the rain was pouring down and the sea a little abating, she made no demur but followed him to hear more. He found two seats on the lower deck, and she let him tuck a rug about her, surprised at the attention, however, saying she didn't want it, but afterwards playing Desdemona to his Othello, listening to the stories of adventure he fitted for her ears. It was there Albert found them, some minutes after they were in harbour. Albert was very pale, and said he had had an awful time. He looked curiously at her companion, but waited until he had left them before making any comment.

"So, after all, the Johnny was English," he said then. "We weren't very careful what we said before him. But I don't suppose it matters; I don't suppose he is in our set. Touch of 'reach me down' about his clothes, wasn't there? I say, you'll have to give up that sort of thing, sitting about talking to men you haven't been introduced to. You're somebody now. I suppose I ought to have trotted after you. But oh! God! I was bad! What did he talk to you about? If you meet him again anywhere you mustn't bow, you must pretend not to know him."

Manuella said they had talked about travelling, she had found him awfully interesting, she should do what she chose and bow to him whenever she met him.

"Talked about travelling, did he? I thought he looked like a bagman," Albert answered, and there let the matter drop. Steppie would soon teach her, he thought; *he* need not jaw at her.

But in the bustle of finding their luggage, getting off the ship, and that sharp little exchange of talk with Albert, she forgot even to say good-bye to him. Lord Lyssons had not obtruded himself nor offered any services. He read her brother's disapproving and critical eyes, and agreed he was right to disapprove. The girl was too ingenuous, unsophisticated—certainly too beautiful to talk to every casual acquaintance. By his very inclination to ask her name, his wish to see her again, he knew Albert was in the right. He laughed about it to himself when he was in the train, thinking of the undergraduate's lofty expression. But he did not laugh when he thought about the girl. He wondered to what sort of home she was going so reluctantly, what fate was in store for her. How she had listened to his stories, how gloriously her eyes had lit up!

He never guessed, never came within a hundred miles of guessing, that this was the bride who had been offered to him. By the time he met her again he had almost forgotten her—almost, not quite!

Albert got better on the way to London and told Manuella more about Stone House. But even then she was hardly prepared for the magnificence in store for her. A motor met them at the station; in ten minutes it rolled between the iron gates, and Albert said:

"Here we are! What do you think of this?" as if she would be awed. A pompous butler swung open the massive door, and there were two powdered footmen to support him. Albert asked almost as pompously as the butler replied:

"Where is Lady Wagner? Is Lady Wagner or Sir Hubert in?"

A gentleman at the head of the lapis lazuli stairs, who, Manuella afterwards understood, was the *major domo,* came forward, and whilst informing them that neither Sir Hubert nor Lady Wagner was at home at the moment, undertook that "her ladyship should be informed of their arrival when she returned." It was all very chill and very formal, and already Manuella felt Lady Wagner's personality in the background. If it had only come six months later; then she would have known where she stood, whether her voice would give her independence, freedom! Her heart panted for freedom; all of it that had not been crushed or cramped by Lœtitia's early training. Here, almost in the first moments of her home-coming, in that great cold hall, with its pillars and staircase, blue marble and shadow, freedom seemed to have receded, her voice to be a feeble and stifled thing, her high hopes but childish dreams. The shadow of the great hall was all at once upon her spirit and upon her voice.

Albert guessed something of what she was feeling.

"Come along. You'll see them both at dinner, don't bother. I'll show you your rooms."

Her rooms were high up, but a lift took her to them. They were large, luxurious; the upholsterer had known what was due to the only daughter of the house. There was a bedroom hung with pink brocade, a sitting-room with walls panelled with mauve silk, a large bathroom with green marble walls. Albert played showman with obvious pride. Certainly their magnificence had impressed him.

"They've got you a maid," he said, "a French woman, who was with the Duchess of Southfields. You'll soon get used to it all," he added patronizingly, for he misread her dismayed look. "I knew it would rather floor you at first. We really are big bugs."

It was the French maid and not the magnificence, that brought the dismayed look to Manuella's expressive face. The woman stood there already, silent and respectful, between herself and Albert, between herself and the

angry tears that for no reason were so near her eyes. Albert left them almost at once, saying she had better "put herself to rights" before Lady Wagner saw her.

"I want a hot bath and an hour's rest before dinner. That time on the boat knocked me over; I'm all to pieces still. You will be all right, won't you?"

Albert was the one thing human to which she had to cling, she had almost clung to him, implored him not to leave her, made a scene, but the maid was there and Albert in a hurry to be off. So she only answered in a stifled voice:

"Don't bother about me; of course I am all right." There was some note in her voice made him hesitate and come back into the room.

"Oh! go on," she said impatiently. "I've got to unpack. What are you staring at me for?"

He gave her a hurried hug; he was really fond of her, although she was always so difficult.

"Don't get the hump. Keep bucked!"

She returned the hug a little wildly, then pushed him away.

"Go and get your bath and rest. You look awfully pale still, what a duffer you are to be sea-sick! Perhaps I'll lie down too."

But she did not give herself any time to rest. In her hurried, impulsive way she began at once to unpack. She ignored the new French maid, who offered help, hot water, comment, exclaimed at her limited school wardrobe. She tried to make up her mind in that first hour of her home-coming to do as Albert said, to submit to circumstances, not to set herself against her stepmother, to make the best of things; it was her spirit and not herself that rebelled.

Already her resolution weakened when, dressed in her best clothes by the concerned and exclamatory French maid—a white dress, with skirt too short and bodice too tight—she waited in the enormous drawing-room all alone for the best part of an hour. Lady Wagner had returned from her afternoon drive, and was now dressing

for dinner, so she heard indifferently, or indignantly, in her changing moods.

Lœtitia's sense of duty brought her to the drawing-room ten minutes before dinner was served to welcome her stepdaughter. The chilly kiss and condescending kindness, the implication in her little set speech that, although there had been much to forgive in the past, she had hopes the future would compensate for it, brought to Manuella a flush of indignation. It was she who had to forgive, she thought. But before she had time to harm herself by hasty speech Albert came in and took the edge off the situation.

Manuella was struck by the comparative friendliness between Albert and his stepmother; it was as if he had gone over to the enemy, and it made her feel her own isolation more acutely, although really he was indirectly asking kindness for her and Lœtitia, in a cold and dignified way, was promising it.

"She is improved, isn't she? The Mater thought you were going to be short and stumpy. She is on the good-looking side, Mater, isn't she? Going to do us credit?"

"I am sure Manuella has come home with that intention."

Manuella had come home with no intention at all; she had come in revolt, and because no choice had been given her.

"She has grown so tall. When she has fined down a bit, she'll have quite a figure."

"She must learn to hold herself better."

"You do stoop, you know, Mimi."

"And to do her hair more tidily."

"I expect the sea blew it about a good deal. We had a most awful crossing."

He spoke of his experiences as if sure of her sympathy. A grown-up deferential stepson was more to Lœtitia's taste than had seemed possible in the past, when he was under his sister's influence. She was as kind to Albert as her nature permitted. Sir Hubert, too, when he came in, listened with interest to Albert's accounts of his

sea-sickness. It was evident that he, Albert, had his position here. Manuella was the outsider; she felt it already. Her father's indifference hurt her, although he, too, meant to be kind, and said pleasantly that she had grown out of knowledge. They were half-way through dinner before he spoke to her again. For, unfortunately, he was given Perrier water instead of Evian, and it was as if a crime had been committed in the house.

"I keep twenty-three servants, and can't have a glass of water at my own table. . . ."

There was some trouble later about a custard pudding. Sir Hubert lived on a diet that seemed to be unsatisfying and to irritate him very much. When he did remember Manuella again, he said she had grown very like her mother, who "was the most beautiful girl in Cuba, and that is saying a great deal, I can tell you."

Lœtitia was annoyed at his referring to the days before he had gone to South Africa. She wished him to forget that he once planted tobacco. He annoyed her again when he went on speaking; she intended to be sure that the girl would meet her in the right spirit before she was made independent.

"You come to me in the morning, and I'll see about giving you something for pocket-money. I hope you're not as extravagant as your brother. . . ."

But it was obvious he was satisfied with, if not proud of, Albert's extravagance. Then he had capsules to take, and some powders in a wineglass of water. He was really a very miserable millionaire, who suffered from a stomach that was as distended as his bank balance; he could not break himself of the impulse to go on piling into both, and it was this habit that obliterated all his other qualities and characteristics. Already Manuella knew she could expect nothing from him but pocket-money, and that her stepmother ruled the household.

Sir Hubert said again that she had grown very like her mother—Spanish-looking, and would suit a mantilla. Manuella was not even pleased by his praise. She was born in South Africa of an English father and had grown

fiercely patriotic in her foreign schools. There was really nothing of the Spaniard about her but her glorious eyes, and perhaps her development; she was anything but languorous, and wore her absurd school-girl clothes like a Parisienne. Lœtitia owned herself distressed at Manuella's tendency to *embonpoint,* but Albert said reassuringly that it was only "puppy fat." Manuella hated and resented the way they were discussing her, but found herself without courage or opportunity to tell them so. And it was well she kept silent, or Lady Wagner, too, might have become less reticent. As it was, she was critical, and not at all sure that the great scheme she had for her stepdaughter would materialize. Lœtitia found Manuella's freedom of movement unladylike, her short answers *gauche,* her slanginess to Albert vulgar. Her wild hair was certainly "deplorable," and so were her unmanicured hands. And, of course, Manuella felt the unspoken disapproval; soon it was like a cold fog about her.

Lady Wagner herself was scrupulously tidy, not a hair of her grey transformation was ever out of its place; her speech was precise, she held herself upright. Manuella was tired from her journey. After dinner, in the drawing-room again, alone with Lœtitia, she sat in an arm-chair loosely, feeling dispirited. Lord Lyssons had seen her in the wind and rain, but when she was unhappy, and certainly there was a burden upon her to-night, he would have found it difficult to recognize her. Her colour turned to sallowness, the dark brows made her face appear lowering, sullen. She tried to listen to Lœtitia, to answer her naturally when she said pleasantly that it would be well to cultivate an amiable expression. But her words grew fewer, each speech shorter. It was a relief when she was free to go to bed.

The next few days were as bad, or worse, than the first night's dinner. Manuella could never look back upon them without pity for herself. She was past the age when she would fling herself on to the ground and kick and scream for her own way, as had been her reprehensible habit in the nursery and schoolroom, making cor-

poral punishment a necessity. But she could and did resent everything that was being done for her. According to her stepmother she showed an absolute lack of gratitude, or sense of her position.

She began by objecting to her maid.

"I hate her standing over me when I dress. I don't want anybody to put my stockings on for me; I can put them on for myself. Can't I send her away?"

"You have to think of your position, of our position," Lœtitia answered coldly to such complaints.

"I don't see why I can't go out by myself, I am nearly eighteen," was the beginning of another argument.

"That is precisely the reason. I should have thought you would have had enough sense to perceive that you must learn to behave as if you were a young lady of birth, as if you had been born in the society to which I have given you the entrée."

By what process of reasoning Lœtitia had been brought to consider herself so infinitely superior to her husband's children is difficult to follow, but that she was firmly convinced of it is not open to doubt. Manuella had her fitful outbursts of anger, made her futile struggles. Lady Wagner said it was wonderful how little she had improved. Albert begged her to conform, not to fight every project for her benefit. She must have a maid, every girl had a maid. She 'couldn't run about the streets by herself, it wasn't decent, it wasn't proper.' After all, it was true that they had a position to keep up. She felt Albert's defection bitterly; she heard Lœtitia's phrases on his lips. She did not know that he pleaded with Lœtitia for her, in his own way, of course, but quite loyally.

"I should let her down lightly, Mater. She'll come round in time, she don't know what's good for her; she may kick up her heels in the paddock, but she'll go all right when we race her."

Albert was allowed to be slangy, even vulgar. It seemed it was the thing at Eton and Oxford; all his young friends indulged in the same manner of speech.

In a modified way she even took his advice. Manuella, in those first weeks of her home-coming, had nothing to complain of but kindness, crushing, continual kindness, and irresistible cold logic. That was the worst of it. It was true that all that was required of her was to conform to custom, to have her hair done properly and her dresses lengthened, to fit on a great many new clothes, and learn the etiquette of presentation.

There was little enough time to change what Lœtitia euphemistically termed "an overgrown school-girl" into a young lady fitted to take her place in Society. Lœtitia took her to dressmakers, *corsetières,* milliners, sparing no expense. If the girl writhed or flushed or fidgeted, shrugging impatient shoulders at the discussion of her face, figure, or carriage, which went on openly before her, Lœtitia betrayed a dignified unconsciousness of it. She was conscious of doing her duty.

There was, of course, nothing but duty in it, more could hardly have been expected. Their two temperaments were at variance, and their respective positions made common ground impossible.

The old adage about children being seen and not heard seemed to Manuella still to lurk behind her stepmother's politeness. After a half-hearted attempt to talk about the charms of Fontainebleau, those tedious shopping and fitting expeditions were made in comparative silence, and the afternoon drives were little more lively.

Lœtitia had a way of delicately snubbing advances, and Manuella made none after the first week. Rebel as she might, it was true she had no cause of complaint, nothing was being omitted from her social equipment. She was given riding-lessons in a close, tan-smelling school, private dancing lessons, complexion-treatment and specifics were offered her. Lœtitia never lost an opportunity of letting fall conventional phrases on life and conduct.

Lœtitia had expanded since she became Lady Wagner, and now she had attained her full growth. She was satisfied with everything she had, or did, or thought. She often said that she wished Manuella were more like

herself. She drew attention to her own smiles and little graceful bows to the acquaintances they met in the Park —graduated bows. She was never impulsive, and deprecated that quality as being thoroughly middle class. She said you could tell a lady by these little things, and by the way she walked and moved. Lœtitia was unwearied in pointing out that when Manuella walked she took too long steps; she was neither languid nor stately, she lacked distinction. Lœtitia warned her that she must be always on her guard.

As all these things were told or hinted to her, kindly, but very constantly, the girl became stifled by them. She was always solitary, yet never alone. She seemed to be living under a feather-bed, everything was soft, decorous, silent; she really became a little crushed by the great house and many servants, by Lœtitia's personal and genuine conviction of infallibility, and by the impossibility of argument with her. There was nothing to justify her sense of being wronged. Anything she asked for was given to her, or, at least, not refused.

"You will not have time for singing lessons just yet, later on, perhaps. I see no objection to your continuing with your music at the end of the season, when you are less occupied. My dear, if you *could* hold your back a little straighter. . . ."

"My love, could you manage to subdue your voice a little? A low voice in woman is such a great attraction. . . ."

What was the use of muttering that she did not want to be attractive? She knew she talked too loudly, was conscious of an inclination to stoop. It was true that there was no time for singing-lessons at the moment. Her days were filled with dressmakers and frivolous, unnecessary things. Her stepmother was always by her side, directing, instructing her in the duties of her position. She was growing more uncertain about her voice, and whether she would not be found ridiculous if she repeated what Monsieur Lausan had said, it was "impossible to let such a gift lie idle." Now when she raised it

in the rare solitude of her own sitting-room it sounded muffled, dull, as if the house were too large for it, or as if it had contracted to fit some refinement of her step-mother's taste. Her days were full, yet it seemed to her she had nothing to do. She had been well taught, both in Germany and France, but not in the art of looking her best, which here seemed all that was required of her.

In Germany she had learned needlework, cooking, even accounts, but not how to enter and leave a room, to step into a carriage or motor, to curtsy to her Sovereign, to dance modern dances. If they had left her for a longer time at Fontainebleau she might have acquired these further accomplishments.

If it appears that the girl fell too easily under Lœtitia's sway, and showed herself weak in resistance, the excuse is that her supineness was due to physical rather than moral causes.

She was in the period of growth and her life in Continental schools had not fitted her for so sudden a transition. The transplantation affected her, and, although it sounds a *non sequitur,* the food also!

The food at the German schools had been sufficient and simple. It was less so at the Fontainebleau château. The old French aristocrat who dominated it had penurious habits, and, although she condescended to receive a limited number of young ladies, she had no idea of spending on their upkeep the remuneration she accepted for permitting them to enjoy the amenities of her fast-decaying but still magnificent home. They subdued their healthy young appetites, those pupils of Madame de Fontenoy, to the meagre fare of the aristocratic establishment, ate rolls and coffee, and fasted until the *déjeuner* of eggs, and one small *plat* of meat; learnt to be satisfied with *soup maigre* in the evenings, to keep religiously all the Saints' days, and days of fasting.

The change from this to the régime of the Stone House chef, was not without its effect on a constitution so youthful, and a temperament so emotional as that of Manuella Wagner. It clogged her activities. She became ener-

vated, she felt sometimes as if she were caught in a trap. When once she felt like that it was natural she should cease to struggle.

Lœtitia had reason to congratulate herself on the result of her care, and her six weeks' incessant work. Manuella, on the day of her presentation, was almost standardized, fashioned to pattern. She had lost weight, the "puppy fat" and the ebullience had gone. If fault could still be found with her carriage it was nevertheless obvious, to everyone but Lœtitia, that she had natural grace and considerably more than usual good looks. And it was difficult to question her manner; she had the quiet of her stifled spirit, the veneer that had been laid upon her showed no immediate crack.

CHAPTER III

THE presentation duly took place and all the Society papers made mention of "the beautiful daughter of Sir Hubert and Lady Wagner," among the *débutantes,* which, of course, in its way, was extremely gratifying.

Lord Calingford dined at Stone House a day or two later, and Manuella was sent in to dinner with him. At her first ball it was observed that he paid her marked attention. On the opening night of the opera he was seen in the Wagners' box. Rumours were afloat before the season was a week old. In a column devoted to Society in one of the illustrated weeklies, under the heading "Overheard by the little Bird," there were two lines to the effect "that the engagement between the heir to a Dukedom and one of the most beautiful of the *débutantes* will be formally notified in the course of a few days."

Lady Sallust, who had not anticipated so much hurry, came hot foot to Stone House with stories of Calingford's record, Calingford's character. But, with the acquisition of Stone House, Lœtitia's attitude had changed toward Lady Sallust, to whom she no longer deferred absolutely.

"We must make allowances, we cannot put old heads on young shoulders," was her complacent reply to Lady Sallust's relation of the enormities of which Harry Calingford had been guilty.

She said it with that air of complete originality that

always characterized her *clichés*. "Like other young men who are exposed to temptation, he has sown his wild oats. . . ."

"Dragon's teeth," interpolated Lady Sallust. But her allusion was a little beyond the ex-governess.

"In any case discussion is premature. We have not yet heard from the Duke." It was obvious that Lœtitia was secretly elated, and in no humour for discussion as to the character of the projected bridegroom. She gave Lady Sallust no opportunity to mention Waldo's name or bring forward his pretensions.

It is to be presumed that the Duke made the requisite move, for the formal announcement was in the *Morning Post* two days later. Albert swelled over it visibly, and spoke of "My future brother-in-law, Calingford, you know. He will be Duke of Banff. . . ." Lady Wagner now called Manuella "My love," and deferred to her judgment on minor matters, such as her own toilet or daily round of duties.

Manuella herself hardly knew how it came about that she was engaged to be married to Lord Calingford. She did not remember that he had ever asked her, although he seemed to have been by her side ever since the first Court. She seemed to be fighting her way through shadows, moving in a pageant of dreams. Everybody was now extraordinarily pleased with her. Her step-mother found no more fault. Albert hugged her, and said she was a "ripper"; her father remembered her existence and gave her money and jewellery; she was no longer a stranger in the house. As for Calingford himself, the man she was going to marry, he was not in the least intrusive, and during the first few days of her engagement she never saw him alone.

She sat by his side at the dinner-party the Banffs gave in her honour. It was quite a small family dinner-party. The Sallusts were invited, but it was merely a coincidence that Lord Sallust had to be in the House, and Lady Sallust persuaded her nephew to take his place. Really a coincidence, because Lady Sallust had abandoned her

project. Banff was very old and shaky, and since the girl had accepted Calingford, and Lœtitia shut her ears deliberately to everything that was said against him there was nothing more to be done. She told Waldo all about it again on their way to the Banffs' dinner-party. He condoled with her, and said gravely that it was most unfortunate. She had forgotten that he had not fallen in with her plans, and there was no need to remind her under the circumstances.

"You don't think they will send me in with her to-night, my future mother-in-law that is not to be, do you? I haven't got up any of those subjects she examined me upon. It will be a case of switching if they do. I'm sure of it; she will report me to some one. . . ."

He was full of mock fears of Lœtitia, and asked no questions about Harry Calingford's fiancée, who should, according to his aunt, have been his.

Lord Lyssons no longer minded his aunt talking about his marriage, for his plans were quite settled. He was going back to Nigeria. The estates would become free gradually; the lawyers had the matter well in hand. It might take three, or even five years; but, should anything happen to him in the meantime, his young cousin Gilbert would find that everything had been straightened out. As for himself, he had become convinced that he was not cut out to be a great English aristocrat. In common with that girl he had met on the boat, and of whom he sometimes caught himself thinking, freedom was his great need. He saw it in front of him for the next few years at least, and consequently he was in the best of spirits.

Lady Sallust enjoyed her drive from Grosvenor Square to the Inner Circle of Regent's Park.

"One always feels they live in the Zoo," she said, plaintively, when she had given the footman the address.

"What entertainment could be better than seeing the animals feed? It is kind of you to bring me. I suppose we shall see Harry Calingford champing his jaws, five-

pound notes dropping from his mouth, with horrid growls and noises, as he scrunches up that million."

He had very little real interest in the subject, was only going to this dinner-party to oblige his aunt, and amused himself with inconsequences to pass the time. He knew he would be bored.

Considering he had so often thought of the girl he had met on the boat, it was strange that, during the first half of the Banffs' dinner-party, he failed to recognize her. But perhaps it was not so strange as it seemed. Manuella by this time had been run, as it were, into a mould, and become, outwardly at least, like all the other girls in their first season who were dressed by Paquin, Jay, or Hayward, coiffed by Lentheric, and hatted by Lewis. One could not see the tree for the foliage. And Lord Lyssons was looking at neither. He had been sent in to dinner with the Duke's sister, who was eighty years old; very scraggy, very deaf, and notoriously disagreeable. She had, of course, been destined for Lord Sallust.

"Lucky fellow, my uncle," Lyssons ventured to say to her, half-way through dinner.

"I don't see it; he has been out of office seven years," she snapped.

"The privilege of serving his country . . . to-night," he suggested.

"What is going on to-night? More trucklings to that wretched little Welsh solicitor."

She, too, was rabidly political, and Waldo was even more bored than he anticipated. She spoke of the marriage afterwards, and asked what he thought about it.

"Dreadful, I call it, quite dreadful! Such people! I don't know what Banff is thinking of."

"Which is the bride?" Waldo asked, and, with his glass in his eye, looked round the table indifferently.

"She is sitting beside him. They call her good-looking, but I am sure I cannot see it. She is heavy and sullen or stupid. I know I cannot get a word out of her."

"Good heavens!" He took his glass out; the ejacula-

tion was under his breath. "It can't be, but it is! What have they done to her?"

Lady Araminta had but a dull companion after that; he was too abstracted even to make fun of her. All her malicious or spiteful speeches passed him unheeded. When she asked him what he thought of the "*mésalliance,*" he scarcely answered.

So that was the Wagners' daughter; the girl of the boat! How often he had caught himself thinking of her. But never like this. She was going to marry Harry Calingford. How had it come about? He recalled all he knew of Calingford. It seemed to him a horrible sacrifice—that child—and Calingford! Truly it was throwing her to the wolves. He looked at her again, wondering about her.

The dinner lasted an inordinate time; everything was done in an old-fashioned way; the dinner-table looked as if it had come out of the Ark. There were huge epergnes loaded with fruit and flowers, early Victorian. But for the intervening epergnes she might have recognized him. There was neither light in her eyes nor flush upon her cheek; she looked tired, sallow, not happy, certainly she did not look happy.

"The last girl in the world I should have thought would have married for a title."

He had already half a mind to seek her out afterwards and ask her why she was doing it. That she-dragon of a stepmother perhaps.

The interminable dinner came to an end. The ladies left the room; he tried again to catch her eyes and failed. When he sat down, Harry Calingford had moved his seat to the one beside him.

The two men had been at Eton together, although there were five or six years between them.

Calingford was a short, thickset man, with a narrow forehead, red nose and heavy moustache. He had a certain contempt for Lyssons, who was a lower boy when he left Eton in all the pride of Pop. Waldo was "only a parson's son" then, and had been educated at home; two very good reasons for despising him. And there

were others; he was a "sap," and went in for prizes. They had met very seldom in after-life, their ways lay so far apart. Still, the school-days were a link, and Harry was by way of being host.

"Seems a century since you and I were at school together. You've been after big game, haven't you? Come home to settle down? Same old round. I've got jolly sick of it, you know I'm going to be married—of course you know it. Remember when Dunholme and I wrote exeats for each other, and took a couple of days in town, and the Governor came down unexpectedly? We nearly got sacked over that job. By God! we did. I believe it was before your time. What a queer little devil you were, and how we roasted you!"

Waldo remembered vividly how he had hated him, fag master and head of the house, tyrant and bully, unmentionably worse. He found his old dislike returning. Calingford became talkative over his wine; he began to drink before he left Eton, and it was a habit that had grown on him. Waldo thought that he was just the same. Characters never alter, they only develop.

He became uneasily conscious that the man revolted him, that everything he said jarred, that in another minute or two he would probably be extremely rude to him. He pushed his chair back, thinking he had better get away, upstairs, or out of the house. Harry Calingford would not let him escape so easily; he went on talking—school days, college days, then back again to his approaching marriage, about which he became extremely communicative.

"Hard lines on Milly, isn't it? We've been together six years now; but what's a fellow to do? I'm glad I never let her leave the stage. You saw her in the *Girl from the East,* I suppose? Ripping song, hers in the second act. They talk of these Russian dancers; give me an English girl, I say, for make and movement! Look at Milly's figure now. . . ."

The Duke rose, and the other men followed his example; it was time to join the ladies.

The first thing Lord Lyssons did on returning to the drawing-room was to find his aunt, and the first question he asked her, without circumlocution or preliminary, was:

"And who is Milly?"

"Milly? Milly?"

Lady Sallust looked round the room inquiringly with a puzzled expression.

"You are always so abrupt. Milly who? I don't see any Milly."

"No! I suppose she is not here to-night? On consideration, I should think it very unlikely she would be invited, although I hear she is such a great friend of the bridegroom's. . . ."

"Of Harry Calingford's! Of course! Why didn't you say what you meant. You never do, I'm sure I don't know why! You mean Milly Leroy, of the Gaiety. But who has been talking about her?" She dropped her voice.

"They say he has two children by her, and she is seriously attached to him—devoted, in fact. She has not appeared since the engagement has been announced. The Duke is to make a settlement. Of course, he won't really give her up. I declare I am sorry for that girl."

"Milly?"

"Don't be absurd; the Wagner girl. She would be really quite handsome if only she had a little more animation."

"And is she, too, devoted to Calingford?"

"I don't believe she knows what she is doing. Did you ever see a girl look more depressed; she watches Lœtitia's eye. . . ."

"Take me over and introduce me. I want to congratulate her, Calingford and I were at Eton together."

The introduction was effected and he dropped into the vacant seat beside Manuella.

"You don't remember me," was the first thing he said to her.

"Yes, I do," she answered quickly. "I knew you at once." Then she smiled, and it was the first sign of animation she had shown; he saw the child in her again,

the smile was mischievous, amused. "I wish Albert were here, he was so certain you were a bagman; he was awfully angry with me for talking to you."

"I think myself it was somewhat unladylike," he said coolly. She glanced at him astonished. "Reprehensible. In fact, you must have lost sight of your position." She saw then that he was imitating her stepmother, and laughed again.

Calingford sauntered up to them and said:

"You seem to be saying something very amusing; dashed if I've ever seen Miss Wagner laugh before." She changed countenance when he came up to them, but he did not stay. "I'll come back presently. I suppose I must make myself agreeable to some of these people."

Lyssons rescrewed his eyeglass and regarded her again.

"A bagman! That was a bad guess of Albert's! I suppose Albert is your brother. I thought you were quite a little girl. Haven't you grown up very quickly? I can't make it out at all. Don't look as if you want to get up and follow Calingford, you will have time enough for him; you can surely give me five minutes."

The toss of the head, the flush, the quick unspoken denial altered her completely.

"I have often wondered what became of you, or whether the Great Eastern swallowed you up. I've any number more of adventures to relate. Do you think Calingford will be jealous if I sit here?"

"I don't care if he is."

"It *is* only the strawberry leaves, then?" he exclaimed, as if inadvertently. She turned startled eyes upon him. He had little forgotten what wonderful eyes they were; he looked full into them and said coolly:

"Don't be cross."

"Why did you say that?"

"Well, I suppose I must congratulate you, and that was my way of doing it, a little unconventional, perhaps, but I *am* unconventional; my aunt tells me so constantly. I suppose you are going to be married almost immediately?"

"I don't know."

"Now you are frowning. I say, I believe Calingford is going to have a devil of a time. You *have* a bad temper, haven't you?"

She reddened; it was extraordinary how much of the child there was still in her. What was more extraordinary still was the strange pain it gave him to recognize it. The pain ebbed to tenderness and hurt him. Poor child! poor hare! Of course, she had not been allowed a run. His aunt was a lunatic to think he might have taken Calingford's place; but already he wished anyone but Calingford had it.

"Everyone says I have a bad temper so I suppose it's true."

"You don't bite!"

"No."

She smiled again. He thought her mouth the prettiest thing about her, although that, too, had lost some of its colour.

"I wonder at that. I should, in your case. I should have bitten Lady Wagner, I am sure of it. I nearly did it the last time we met."

He wanted to get that strained look out of her eyes and the laughter back into them. As he sat there talking light nonsense, he saw the alteration in her more plainly. And yet it seemed to him it was only an external alteration, that underneath it was the girl of the boat. He went on talking to her until the time came for them both to go. There was not a word of seriousness, hardly of sense, in what he said, but it seemed to amuse her; she laughed and responded. He spoke again of their unlicensed acquaintance, and recalled Albert's supercilious looks. It seemed a very long time ago, the last pleasant thing she remembered. She had been only a child then; she wished she were a child still. She had forgotten her dreams since she had become engaged, but she remembered them again when Lord Lyssons told her how much she had altered.

"You are as different as possible; you are the pattern young *débutante* of the London season."

But it was not the *débutante* he saw, the *débutante* in the white satin dress, with the string of priceless pearls and the hair with feathers; it was that which was imprisoned in them. When at her stepmother's notification she rose to go, he said:

"We shall meet again, I suppose?"

She answered impulsively, for Lœtitia had not succeeded in checking her impulsiveness completely:

"Oh! I hope so."

"What a damned shame! What a damned, infernal shame!" he said, when he was in the carriage with his aunt, returning to Grosvenor Square.

"What? My dear boy! what has happened?"

He had forgotten he was not alone.

"The Insurance Bill," he answered promptly. "It is impossible to defend the Contributory Clauses."

"You may well say so. . . ."

The herring was a complete success; the topic lasted until he left her at her own door, again persuaded that he was more serious-minded than appeared on the surface.

CHAPTER IV

THEY met again, not once, but many times; they seemed to be always meeting. There was nothing strange in that, for they moved in the same world, and very little manœuvring was necessary to bring it about. Manœuvring is hardly the word, it really occurred naturally. Manuella had more freedom now; part of the responsibility for her conduct was Lord Calingford's. At least, that was the way Lœtitia looked upon it, and felt she was no longer tied to her uncongenial task.

Lord Calingford was not an early riser. It was with Lord Lyssons Manuella took her early morning ride in the Row. She became on easy and familiar terms with him while her fiancé remained little more than a figure-head. She had a way of regarding Calingford as one of her stepmother's friends, and was stiff and unreal in his company, formal, exhibiting all the new polish that Lœtitia had imparted to her. With Lord Lyssons she let herself go. He was too tall and thin to look well on horseback. She christened the large beast he bestrode "Rosinante," and always called him Don Quixote. The light surface talk between them was of adventure and horses, with easy badinage.

"You talk to me as if I were ten years old," she said once petulantly.

"I know. I forget your years, I only talk to your

intelligence." He liked teasing her and seeing her pout or frown.

"I don't mind your being bad-tempered," he told her once. "What I can't stand is seeing you look as if you have become slowly petrified under your stepmother's stony eye."

"When do I look like that?"

She gave her horse a touch with the whip, galloped up the tan, and did not wait for an answer. He galloped after her, remaining silent until she pulled her horse in again. When they were trotting side by side, as if there had been no pause in question and answer, he said:

"When you are with your fiancé."

Now their horses were walking, and he was watching her. Her face was shadowed by the broad-brimmed riding-hat, a little averted from him. He went on, because he wanted to make her face him.

"I suppose your feelings are too much for you," he said contemplatively; "you are so awfully in love with the fellow that you can't talk. I've heard of that kind of thing." And then, for he saw the flush, and that he was making her angry, he added thoughtfully:

"I don't know the symptoms very well. I have never been in love myself."

"Neither have I," she flashed at him, as if he were accusing her of something unworthy or ridiculous. "Neither have I. Who said I had? What has love to do with it? You are always trying to annoy me."

"But you were just as annoyed when I alluded to the attraction strawberry-leaves had for you," he continued mildly. "Which reminds me, by the way, that I heard this morning the Duke is ill—influenza. Will that hasten or retard your marriage?"

"I don't know."

"Is it to be soon, or mustn't I ask that either?"

"Not until the end of the season," she replied hastily.

"You can bear the delay?"

"I wish you wouldn't ask foolish questions."

"It *is* a bad habit of mine."

At the big fancy-dress ball at the Farnboroughs', a few days later, they again found themselves side by side. Harry Calingford impersonated the first Duke of Banff, a contemporary of the great Marlborough's; Manuella's powdered wig, patches and brocaded dress, had been selected by Lœtitia as "so extremely suitable." Waldo dressed the part she assigned him, and would have been Don Quixote to the life but for that incongruous eye-glass.

"The Duchess, by gad!" he greeted her; "to the life, a little premature, but to the life. Not Browning's Last Duchess, but Banff's first. I suppose you fancy yourself. Why are you looking cross? Why tarries the Duke?"

She did not look cross, she looked unhappy, and he saw it, and was a little unhappy with her, not seeing the way to help her. Lady Sallust had told him things were not going well with the engagement. Lord Calingford was inattentive; it was believed he wished to get out of it. Milly was understood to be making scenes.

"Aren't you enjoying yourself?"

"I hate feeling dressed up."

"As the Duchess of Banff?"

"Any way."

"Why were you not in the Row this morning?" She did not answer him for a moment, and he repeated the question.

"Got up too late, I suppose. Shockingly idle life you lead!" he said with mock seriousness. "I shall have to talk to your stepmother."

A ghost of a smile lurked in the corner of her mouth.

"That is what I was doing."

"Talking to your stepmother?"

"We had a few words——" She stopped short.

"What had you been doing? Not saying 'Yes, please,' or 'No, thank you'? Leaving fat upon your plate, forgetting your pinafore?"

The few words she had had with her stepmother had been on his, Lord Lyssons', account.

"You must not allow him to make you conspicuous

with his attentions; I understand he joins you in your morning ride. I dislike to find fault, but Lord Lyssons is known to be very erratic, almost eccentric; he might wish to compromise you. . . ."

She had flamed up in his defence, and Lœtitia had ended the interview loftily.

"Very well. I am sure you know best. Young people always know more than their elders. We will not discuss the matter any further. I felt it my duty to warn you."

Lœtitia avoided scenes with Manuella now. She wished she could expedite the marriage, but Lord Calingford had spoken of "the end of the season"; and she could not show more eagerness than he.

Manuella remembered the morning's encounter, and her ghost of a smile changed to a decided frown.

"I wish you wouldn't always speak as if I were a child; it's so stupid. I'm tired of it."

"Are you out of temper or out of spirits this evening?"

"Both," she answered shortly, turning her head away from him. They were interrupted, but he found her again in the conservatory just before supper. Her fiancé was beside her, obviously he was doing his duty, but yawning over it; she looked unhappy, but Harry Calingford only looked bored. He greeted Waldo cheerfully:

"Hullo, Waldo—Don Quixote! Good idea; they called you that at Oxford, didn't they? Here, take my place; won't you? I'm not much of a dancing man."

When they were alone he said to her quite frankly, gently—in a manner different from the light and easy one he generally took with her:

"You are out of spirits. Can't you tell me about it? Is there anything I can do?"

She answered moodily, but just as frankly:

"There is nothing anybody can do. I've made a fool of myself, that's all."

"It is Calingford, then?"

"I can't imagine why I ever said 'yes' to him. Now I have got to stick to it, I suppose."

"You don't like him?"

"What is the good of talking about it? I don't like anything."

"Except talking to me?"

"Except talking to you."

She smiled, but her smile was a short-lived thing. "I hate everything—myself most. You had better go away. I don't want to talk."

"I do."

"Talk to someone else, then."

"Don't stamp your foot. You know you are mentally stamping your foot."

Tears were near the surface of her eyes, and he divined them.

"Poor girlie!" He said it very low, but she felt her eyelids smarting. It was ridiculous to cry at a fancy dress ball.

"I don't want to be pitied," she said abruptly, rudely.

He relapsed into silence, he did not know what he could do for her. They had hurried and "jockeyed" her into this engagement. She had given her word and felt that she must keep it. She would have been better off with him. As he thought of that contingency, he had a queer little twinge or thrill in the region of his heart.

"A beastly mess you've made of things!" was what he said.

"I know I have."

"There is no way out, I suppose?"

"It isn't his fault; he hasn't done or said anything. And I've promised."

He could see that she was turning and twisting in the trap in which they had caught her, writhing!

"You want to be free! Your little heart is panting for freedom. I know; I understand; that is why we are friends."

"Are we friends? I did not know I had any friends. My stepmother says I haven't, that I should not keep them if I had."

"Your stepmother is . . . is unmentionable. Of course, I am your friend—Father Confessor, if you like. I know what is the matter with you. You feel trapped, imprisoned. I have the same feeling all the time I am in London. I go away next month." Then he added lightly, his heart heavy for her, but his speech light:

"It is a pity you can't come with me. . . ."

"To Rhodesia? Oh! how I should love that!"

In her swift change of mood her eyes lit up under her curled lashes, and she turned to him, clasping her hands:

"To go back to Rhodesia! Yes! that is what I should like. Wouldn't it be wonderful?"

She was young and impulsive. Had she been a woman he might have risked the speech that rose to his lips. He had the sudden desire and quickened heart-beat. "Come," he wanted to say. "Why not come? We'll taste freedom together."

His arms were ready for her, his heart open. She needed care, and he understood her, understood her better than anyone else; he felt an immense impulse of tenderness towards her, it was not for himself he wanted her, it was for her—to make her happy. He quite believed that. But she was going to marry Harry Calingford, and the Duke was dying. He had no right to speak, he had nothing to offer her. He pulled himself together.

"As it happens, I am going to Nigeria," he said coolly.

She had flushed and brightened in that impulsive minute. Now she paled, and, because of the look she gave him, he wanted to kiss her; it was the most irrational wish he had ever had in his life, the most indefensible. He did not know what was happening to him.

"In a rage again?" he asked softly, after a few minutes. "I'll go to Rhodesia, if you like. But it is not so interesting."

"I always say the wrong thing."

"So do I. It is a way we have, I suppose; another bond between us. It does not matter when we talk to

each other." She was grateful to him for saying that. "We understand each other," he added.

"I suppose we do."

Did they? He thought not. He wanted to kiss her, for instance, and it was impossible that she wanted to kiss him.

"Pretty well; not quite. You have not an idea what I am thinking about at this moment, for instance."

"What are you thinking about?"

"Your lips. . . ." He did not say it, he said instead:

"Don't you want me to tell you about Nigeria? flaunting your Rhodesia, indeed! Do the natives paint their legs red in your country? Of course they don't; they are just commonplace Nigs." He dashed into travel talk. Strange figures strolled into the conservatory; they were no longer alone.

"Got out of that just in time," he said to himself, with a sigh of relief, when she was claimed by a partner. He did not understand himself in the least. He thought when he got home that he was only sorry for her; he did not know that already she was in his heart.

"I am twice her age!"

So was Harry Calingford—more than that.

"I shall have to clear out before I make a damned fool of myself. She would rather talk to me than to him, she wants gentle handling, with her quick temper and pride. Of course she is proud. They've jockeyed her into it, and now she'll keep her word at any cost." Then he saw her eyes again—glorious eyes, but puzzled. "I puzzle her. She doesn't know what to make of me." He smiled, but it was a wry and fleeting smile. He was conscious of quickened heart-beat, sudden hunger, an impossible thrill or longing. It did cross his mind that he was falling in love with her, but he dismissed the intrusive thought. He said to himself again that he was twice her age, that she was not a woman at all; he was ashamed of the visions that pursued him.

That night—the night of the fancy-dress ball—

Manuella, too, slept badly. Why had she promised to marry Lord Calingford? She could not think how it had come about. She had no feeling at all for him; he was dull, heavy, uninteresting. She supposed she would have to marry him now, but shrank dismayed from the prospect, comforting herself, however, by remembering her wedding-day was a long way off; there was always a possibility that something might intervene. She was sure he found her dull too; he did not seem to care at all for her company. She thrust him from her mind and allowed Lord Lyssons to take his place. *He* was never dull; one never knew what he would say next, but one always wanted to hear. It seemed to her that she was never long enough with him; something or somebody always interrupted them. Supposing she had been going to marry him instead of Lord Calingford? The supposition made her redden a little in the darkness, under the bedclothes. She was sure she would never have felt dull with Lord Lyssons.

In the morning two things happened, bearing a relation to each other. So many days nothing at all happened, but on this day there were two co-related circumstances.

At eight o'clock in the morning a letter was brought to Manuella. The handwriting was strange to her; she had few correspondents but her school friends; theirs were generally foreign letters, and this was English. It might, of course, be an invitation; it was not sufficiently ornate for a circular, there was no crest nor monogram on the envelope. Invitations and circulars generally went to Lady Wagner, but this might be an exception. She had no prevision of its contents when she opened it; why should she have had?

It was quite a long letter, and she read it through twice, its contents being difficult to master, to understand. She did not know such things happened except in books. She felt humiliated; that was her first feeling when she had mastered the contents of Milly Leroy's letter. Nothing unclean, shameful, ugly, had ever touched her before. She was for destroying it, then for going with it

to her father; but she was ashamed. That was what she felt most definitely—shame. As if she would have taken another woman's husband had she known! She could not hold the letter in her hand, it was horrible to her. She did not get any further than that at once; no thought of her freedom came to her, or rejoicing. In some way, some strange way, her delicacy and modesty were outraged. She was a little stunned, but through it she felt that a great indignity had been put upon her. Inside she was all trembling with rage and scorn and indignation.

She put off her morning ride; her father or stepmother must act for her, dissociate her quickly from this hideous thing, and see that she had no further part in it.

Whilst she was suffering upstairs, sick with indignation and humiliation, Lœtitia, very complacent and with a fresh stock of stale phrases, was inditing a letter of sympathy to her future son-in-law.

"It is with the deepest sympathy I learn the sad news of your dear father's passing away. Your butler has just conveyed it to my *major-domo* through the telephone, and I am gratified at the consideration that has been shown us. I will break it to Manuella as gently as possible. Poor child! I am sure she will share your grief. He had been ailing a long time, but the end was sudden. May I, my dear Harry, add that I am sure you will grace the high position to which you have been called, with our child by your side. . . ."

She scratched that out. They were marrying the girl to a Duke, not tentative, but actual, and all her labours with the girl would be rewarded; but there was no use pretending she would be a fitting helpmate for him. Manuella, although Lœtitia endeavoured now to ignore it, was far from satisfactory. She had not sufficient dignity, she lacked cultured conversation, social tact. It was natural that Lœtitia should reflect what a very much better Duchess she herself would have made. She sighed, recopied the letter, and finished it appropriately.

Then she sent for Manuella.

The girl came quickly; she thought her stepmother

had heard. Anger was now the predominant feeling, increasing anger, against the writer of the letter and Lord Calingford, against her own people for not having known, against herself for having promised to marry the horrid man.

"There it is."

She flung the letter on the table. Lœtitia looked up, astonished, from the one she had just sealed and was about to dispatch.

"There. I don't want to touch it. I suppose you've had the same. . . ."

"Has Lord Calingford written to inform you of the sad event?"

She smiled—Lœtitia's famous smile.

"I forgot, I should have said, has his Grace written?"

"*She* wrote," the girl answered sullenly.

"She! The Duchess! I am surprised." It certainly seemed a lapse in etiquette.

"That woman. . . ."

"What woman? My dear child, I wish you could acquire a more definite method of expressing yourself. What is this?"

Something she read in the girl's face made her take up the letter Manuella had flung down, and it immediately arrested her attention. A pale, indignant colour stained her cheeks, becoming accentuated in her thin nose as she read the signature at the end. The facts contained in it were not as new to Lœtitia as they were to Manuella.

"What a disgraceful letter! An outrageous and disgraceful letter; probably not one word of truth in it; the letter of a shameless woman."

Manuella was standing; she was waiting for some condemnation of the man whose name was mentioned, watching her stepmother as she read:

"I have two children by him. I went to live with him before his eldest brother died; he was only the second son; he promised he would marry me as soon as his

father died—swore it a hundred times. Now he is going to throw me over altogether. I wish you could see my little boy; he is the image of him. You may have children, he says he must have an heir; but my Harry will always be his eldest son. I've been crying my eyes out over it for days before I made up my mind to write to you. It's cruel, that's what it is, cruel; I've been as good as a wife to him, never looked at another man before or since. I've got a little girl too, not three years old. You can come and see us, if you like—see the home you are breaking up. . . ."

The rest of the letter was in the same strain. It alluded to Harry Calingford's past, to many things of which Manuella was in ignorance.

"*I knew he wasn't a saint, if his brother had not died they would never have forgiven him that Oxford affair nor taken any more notice of him. I took him when he was down on his luck, made a man of him. They said he was a hopeless drunkard, but he has drunk nothing to speak of for the last six or seven years. I tell you, he is my man; I've made him. I haven't been living on him. I've earned enough for the two of us; I'd have danced my toes off if he wanted money. I don't suppose you know what it is to love a man like that; it isn't his title I care about, it's him, the father of my children. . . .*"

"A disgraceful letter," Lœtitia said again, and after a moment's thought she went on:

"My love, you were quite right to bring it to me. The woman must be dealt with severely; your father will take it up, or the lawyers. To send such a letter to a mere girl! But these creatures are all alike, they have no sense of shame. Let it lie there; don't touch it. Put it out of your mind." She waved it away with her hand. Manuella turned from pale to red. "I have other news for you!"

It really seemed as if she had put the letter out of her mind; it lay there like an unclean thing, but Lœtitia

seemed to have forgotten it. "I think you had better sit down; it has been a shock to you. This letter," she held up the one she had written, "is to Harry, to your fiancé; it is a letter of condolence. You may like to add a line, or, better still, you will write to him yourself. Harry, our poor Harry, has lost his father. Harry is now the Duke of Banff. You look quite pale. Shall I ring for a glass of wine for you? I do not, as a general rule, approve of intoxicants in the morning, but if you think you would like it . . . I have told him he must not grieve, he will fulfill the high position to which he has been called."

"What are you going to do about that letter?"

The girl was going to be tiresome, Lœtitia scented it.

"You had better lie down a little," she said soothingly. "We won't talk about this dreadful letter any more. It is of Harry we must think, and the change in his circumstances. Do you feel equal to writing him a line, or shall I add a postscript? . . . Don't look so distressed . . . of course, it will make a great difference."

"I am not going on with my engagement."

"You are a little overwrought just now." Lœtitia meant to be very gentle and very tactful with her. "You must really not attach undue importance to an anonymous letter, practically an anonymous letter; for as far as I can make out, the woman is entitled to no name, no name at all. I understand she calls herself Leroy; probably she is Smith, or Jones."

"You knew about it?"

"My dear, will you not try and be calm? You are always so emotional. It is right you should know nothing of such things. Young men will be young men, they are exposed to great temptations. It is not a matter we can discuss. If you will be guided by me, you will think no more about it. You must not, of course, ever allude to it to Harry. . . ."

"To Lord Calingford!"

"The Duke of Banff," she corrected gently.

"I should think I wouldn't. I shall never speak to him again."

"My dear," she smiled leniently. "You have no idea how absurd you are making yourself."

No amount of soothing or lenient smiles met the occasion. Manuella stormed and cried, and behaved, so Lœtitia averred, outrageously.

"I'll never speak to him again, he's a disgusting, degrading, beastly, horrid man!" she cried violently, talking wildly through her gasping breath.

"You don't care, you don't care how I'm insulted, and . . . and outraged. How dared he? how dared he ask me to marry him? How dared you let me say 'Yes'?"

CHAPTER V

NOTHING could move the girl from the attitude she had taken up; neither her father's arguments nor Albert's had any effect upon her. To discuss the matter at all was extremely difficult, and, as Lœtitia said, Manuella's obstinacy was inconceivable. The way she persisted in declining to ignore this disreputable person's appeal was thoroughly unladylike, and showed an innate lack of refinement. Lœtitia was naturally exasperated as she saw herself losing the opportunity of being the stepmother of a Duchess. She fought as long as she was able and in every way that was possible. Manuella did allow herself to be persuaded to do nothing until after the funeral. Lœtitia thought time would bring her to a better state of mind. But, before sufficient time had elapsed, the very day after the funeral, in fact, Lady Wagner was astounded, humiliated, she said, by hearing that the new Duke had written to Sir Hubert, withdrawing his pretensions! The news was in the papers before she recovered from the shock.

The marriage arranged between His Grace the Duke of Banff and Miss Wagner will not take place.

It stared her in the face from the fashionable column of her *Morning Post,* curt, decisive, the overthrowal of all her hopes.

It may be imagined that Manuella's position in the house became an unpleasant one. Her father again ignored her, Albert went back to Oxford, and Lœtitia lost no opportunity of expressing her opinion upon the heinousness of her conduct. It transpired that Manuella had sent Milly Leroy's letter to the new Duke of Banff, accompanied by one of her own, candid and characteristic.

"I believe every word she says is true. I think it was hateful and disgusting of you, and I will never see or speak to you again."

Lord Lyssons heard about it from Harry himself, strangely enough. The Duke had the honesty to say to everybody who inquired of him that Miss Wagner had thrown him over, not he her.

"I don't know but what I'm glad to be out of it," was his comment. "It was like being in a damned kindergarten."

It was understood that he would return to Milly, even if he failed to regularize her position. Something in her letter may have touched him. He always knew that Milly cared nothing for his rank.

Lord Lyssons displayed so much interest in the matter that his aunt, who was not a very observant person, actually became aware of it. He was restless, inclined to gossip, in and out of Grosvenor Square continually.

"I suppose she is having the devil of a time with that stepmother of hers," he said to Lady Sallust on one of these occasions.

"They say she is being kept on bread and water, locked up in her room."

"Gone back to the eighteenth century?"

"I saw Lœtitia yesterday. She is very touchy about it. Of course, it is a dreadful disappointment to her."

"Why don't you ask the girl to come here for a bit. Ease the situation, you know; separate them."

"Ask her here—to stay with me?"

"It wouldn't be such an extreme step, would it?"

"It is quite unnecessary."

She sat very upright in her chair. It was impossible to misunderstand what he was asking her. "If you are really so much interested. . . ."

"You are not going to repeat that unholy proposition of yours?" He was examining one of the miniatures, avoiding her eyes.

"I am, indeed. Why should you go to Nigeria?"

"The climate suits me."

"Don't be absurd, it is a dreadful climate, everybody says so. You would be a much better match for her than Harry Calingford was, I told you so before."

He had made up his mind to nothing. Manuella was no longer to be met in the Row; Rosinante and he searched for her in vain.

"Lady Wagner has taken quite a special dislike to me."

"That will not matter at all. She certainly hates her stepdaughter."

He brought forward other objections, of which not the least was the disparity in their ages.

Lady Sallust combated all the scruples he set up; there was little doubt he set them up for her to demolish. Yet he was really in half a dozen minds about coming forward as a suitor for the girl's hand. He had a great dread lest she should be forced to accept him as she had been forced to take Calingford.

But Lady Sallust was urgent, and when she saw he was moved by the relation of the girl's treatment at her stepmother's hands, she used all the force of it for argument.

"It is really not only of you I am thinking; the girl is evidently unhappy, and being kept practically in confinement, one does not see her anywhere. I hear she is not even allowed in the Row."

That was true, and Waldo knew it. But he did not know that he was the excuse.

"There is no use you running after Lord Lyssons," Lœtitia said cruelly. "No decent man would look at you

under the circumstances of your broken engagement; your meddling in a gentleman's private affairs."

Lœtitia forgot she had formerly suggested that Lord Lyssons was running after Manuella and endeavouring to compromise her. She was sure now that the girl was running after him. Manuella's pride and sensitiveness were both hurt; her stepmother said bitter and unforgettable things to which she sometimes retorted hotly, but which were never without their effect. Her spirits failed under the treatment she was receiving, she became glad to be allowed to remain in her own room, to escape observation.

Lady Sallust was not authorized to approach Lady Wagner on her nephew's behalf, but she nevertheless took upon herself the responsibility of sounding her. The failure of the ducal alliance had subdued Lœtitia, too, to some extent, and she welcomed Lady Sallust's visit with ingratiating warmth. Lady Sallust employed circumlocution, she knew the way to gain Lœtitia's ear. She spoke casually of Banff, and his undesirable habits and conditions, and very warmly of Waldo.

"Banff is a mushroom to Waldo, as you know. The one is the ninth duke, and the other the twenty-first earl —the earldom dates from 1446. Not that that would count with you, but it does make a difference, doesn't it? I understand the young people are already attracted towards each other. Of course, it is early days, but I suggest they should be given an opportunity to meet."

Lœtitia was attracted by the idea, although she disliked what little she had seen of the suggested suitor. She wished to get the girl off her hands; she did not wish for her happiness, but to rid herself of her. Lady Sallust made it clear that Lord Lyssons would not come forward as Harry Calingford had, through his relatives or lawyers.

"He is attracted by the girl; he would like opportunities to meet her, to become better acquainted with her."

This way of doing things went against the grain with Lœtitia. She was genuinely of the opinion that the more anyone saw of her stepdaughter, the less likely he

was to become attached to her. She yielded in the end, however, because the girl was an increasing vexation to her, and such a marriage would leave her with no cause of self-reproach.

She began to take Manuella out again, to entertain and be entertained; the season was still very young. Lady Sallust begged her to keep the matter secret between them, to await events. But Lady Wagner only partially fell in with her view. Certainly she gave Manuella to understand that she was on probation with Lord Lyssons, that he was sorry for her, and wished to see if it were possible for him to replace the Duke. She managed to poison that intercourse to which she agreed. There was an ever-increasing awkwardness between them, the cause of which Waldo was for ever wondering. He feared they were putting pressure on her, although he had made no proposal.

He was invited to lunch and to dinner at Stone House, stiff and formal meals, in which he had little opportunity for private talk. Only once he spoke to her of her engagement; that was the day of the final tie of the Army Polo Cup at Ranelagh, about a fortnight after he had begun coming to the house.

He lunched at Stone House and drove down with them afterwards in the motor. Lady Wagner made the third; she was conscientious as a chaperone, perhaps additionally scrupulous because of that idea of hers that the less anyone saw of Manuella the more likely she was to retain his esteem. Waldo noticed Manuella was pale, and thought she had grown thin, too thin; she looked depressed. He recalled the girl of the Channel crossing, and found hardly a trace of resemblance. Lœtitia would have said she had "fined down," Waldo was vaguely uneasy. She had "fined down" to breaking-point. He disliked Lady Wagner even beyond her demerits. This afternoon, as he sat opposite to them both, and his future mother-in-law displayed her pleasing smile and talked about Society, he wanted to strangle her.

It was a great day at Ranelagh. The King and Queen

were coming, and the streets were lined with people. A long string of conveyances impeded the Wagner progress; they were nearly an hour getting into the gardens. All the time Lœtitia talked, but Manuella remained pale and silent. Waldo wanted to know what ailed her, but any attempt he made to question her was frustrated by Lady Wagner's incessant pleasantry and social gifts. She exercised them all for his benefit. She was beginning to know the value of the alliance, one or two envious mothers having made it evident. She was recovering from her disappointment, and was less antagonistic in her manner to Manuella. It was, of course, unfortunately evident that she had no aptitude for conversation, and lacked the social sense. Lœtitia filled up all the gaps that Manuella's silence left, and was extraordinarily self-satisfied in her mauve dress, and her too-youthful hat, and the way she felt she was improving the occasion, and assisting in attracting and enchaining Lord Lyssons.

She would have been surprised if she had heard his whisper to the girl when at last they were walking together to the Polo ground.

"I say, can't we manage to lose her?"

They did manage it, but not until much later, after they had walked about, sat and watched a dull match, when they were at tea together, and his endurance came suddenly to an end. Then Hamel, the flying man, made a diversion. Everyone rushed to the ground where his descent would take place. Lady Wagner decorously kept her seat at the tea-table, and wondered where they were all going, what was happening. But Waldo, seizing Manuella by the arm, hurried her away.

"They are going to see him come down. Come along, I know the way. We must cross the grass."

"Didn't I do that well?" he asked, when they were out of sight and hearing.

But Manuella's answering smile and manner lacked something of spontaneity. She might have been talking in her sleep, so little animation did she show.

"You haven't taken a dislike to me by any chance?" he asked lightly. He did not expect an affirmative answer. His heart contracted suddenly when he saw her hesitation contracted to pain.

"Have I done or said anything to annoy you?"

"Oh, no, of course not," she spoke quickly.

"I'm sure I have. You are quite different to me from what you used to be. We were going to be friends. . . ."

He spoke quickly, he was hurrying her out of the crowd, in the opposite direction to the place of the airman's descent, but he was not too hurried to note the vagueness of her response, her unwillingness.

"Ought we to be going away like this? She has not anyone with her, and does not like being left alone. I don't think she has finished her tea. . . ."

"I don't know what she has done with her tea. But I know she has nearly finished me. Here we are. Never mind Hamel, let us watch the croquet, the hoops are quite in order." There were two chairs under a tree, the ground was deserted. "You need not talk, and for Heaven's sake don't be polite, or mark your periods, or speak the Queen's English. Be slangy, be vulgar, be anything but refined, or pleasing, or agreeable. Heavens! what a woman! No wonder your father suffers from indigestion!"

He made her smile. It was then he asked her again what had ailed her, or if she had taken a dislike to him. He knew she was no longer at ease with him, and he wanted to get back to the old footing.

"I wonder what has become of that red blouse I saw you in first? You wouldn't fill it out as well as you did then." He was eyeing her; she thought he was finding fault. It was the fashion to find fault with her.

"I've grown thinner."

She always flushed easily, and if this time she flushed angrily he liked it better than her unnatural quiet. He began to tease her purposely, as he used, to call her "Alice in Shadowland," and complain that soon there

would be nothing left but her smile. He said she was like the Cheshire cat, only with her it would be her large eyes that remained. He talked lightly, but his heart was tender from the pain of that sudden contraction when she had hesitated in answering him. There was no reason for it. Nothing had come between them.

"You are letting me do all the talking," he complained. "I believe your stepmother is quite right. She told me to-day in her pleasant way that she was afraid I should find you a poor companion."

She flamed out at that:

"She hates the sight of me, and thinks everyone else must!"

"Well, you know I don't, not entirely!" Then, in slightly more serious tone, he added:

"Is that all that is the matter with you, your stepmother and her phrases? A fortnight or so ago I thought it was Harry Calingford. Now I am a little at sea. It isn't me, by any chance, is it? I can't bear you to be so unhappy."

He had asked her for nothing, put forward no claim. He did not mean to give them any pretence for putting pressure upon her.

She resented his curiosity, and did not want him to pity her. Lœtitia's phrase that she was "on probation" with him festered in her.

"There is nothing the matter with me," she said shortly.

"And you have not taken a dislike to me? To my eyeglass, for instance, or anything about my clothes? Albert was telling me he thinks I ought to change my tailor and go to his."

Then again, moved by some unknown fear or misgiving, but more fearful still of showing her his anxiety, he asked:

"Anyone put you against me?"

"No."

It was Lord Lyssons' great misfortune that, when he felt most he could speak least.

"Not hankering after the Duke by any chance, are you? You never told me how you got rid of him, by the way. . . ."

She could not bear to speak of it. Her stepmother said she had behaved in an unladylike manner. She felt wildly the possibility that Lord Lyssons thought so, too, and more wildly that perhaps he had things like this in his own life, women. He wanted perhaps to know if she minded. It was hateful, hateful of him. He was trying to find out if he liked her well enough to marry her. She did not want to marry him or anybody. At that moment she thought she did not even like him any more.

But she changed her mind just as suddenly when he put his hand over hers and spoke softly:

"Never mind, I was only teasing, I don't want to know. I am sure you were more than right. Do you think I ought to have told you, given you a hint? Is that why you are angry with me? I wanted to do it, but I couldn't. You might have thought I was speaking in my own interests."

She looked at him quickly, and he saw in her surprised eyes that she had never even suspected such a thing. He answered the surprise in her eyes with something very like complete candour.

"Well, it came to that, it very nearly came to that—that evening at the fancy-dress ball. I suppose you don't happen to remember how beautiful you looked, and how unhappy. Why don't you begin to look happy? You are free now." His hand tightened over hers and he went on: "You know you are absolutely free, don't you? It is going to be just as you like; they have not told you differently, have they? I am half a hundred years too old for you. . . ."

"Oh, no!" she exclaimed impulsively, then flushed and wished she had not said it. He kept his hand over hers.

"You are sure I am not too old," he said gently.

She had no way of answering him, nor knowledge of

what she might say. She did not care how old he was, nor had she ever given his age a thought.

"It's only because you pity me."

What was only because he pitied her? He had not said anything. She hurried on:

"I want to be left alone, I don't want to be questioned and talked over." She was almost incoherent.

"I'm not talking you over, I have never talked you over. Be fair to me."

"My stepmother says——" But she could not tell him what her stepmother said; she reddened and stopped short, digging the ferrule of her parasol into the turf. His hand still lay over hers, confusing her.

"I know it is only because you pity me," she said futilely.

"Shall I have more reason to be sorry for you if I take Harry Calingford's place, do you think?"

"You don't really want me."

"I could do with you," he answered whimsically.

"I did think we were going to be friends; you said we were."

"I am not saying anything different, am I? You remind me of the woman in the police-court the other day. 'Oh, no, sir, 'e don't often knock me about; 'e's more like a friend than a 'usband.' Come, think it over. You are not going to be hurried."

"I don't want to be married out of pity."

"You won't be, I promise you that," he said quietly, almost under his breath.

And then her troubled eyes sought his, and what she read in them made her drop her own quickly. Neither of them spoke for quite a long time; until he took his hand from hers, and began to talk easily of what was happening in front of them. The excitement of Hamel's descent was over, and people came back over the grass in twos and threes and little groups; the croquet players, mallets in hand, took their places again.

"Are you interested in croquet? This ought to be a good game, we had better stay and watch it. I'll lay

six to one on the man with the Panama hat, there is a deadly earnestness about him. Look at his chin; he has a tournament chin."

Before he got through what he had to say about the croquet, Lady Wagner sailed in sight.

"Oh! there you are. I have been looking everywhere for you. The King and Queen are just going; we ought to be moving too. You know we have the opera to-night, and the reception at the Foreign Office."

Other people joined them, and there was talk of the polo, the flying, the croquet. They did not speak again to each other. He excused himself from driving back with them, and Manuella was glad of it. She felt very agitated, excited; he seemed to have told her something strange, new, wonderful, incredible, something that made her pulses beat irregularly. She drove back in absolute silence, feeling no resentment when Lœtitia said icily:

"It is a pity you lack sprightliness, *aplomb*. I fear Lord Lyssons considers you but a poor companion, and prefers to seek more agreeable, more lively, society. I do my best, but you give me no assistance—no assistance at all, when I try to draw you into the conversation."

CHAPTER VI

IF during the days that followed Manuella was in a tumult of feelings, and understood none of them, Lœtitia's vigilant chaperonage may have been partly responsible. Waldo thought he had told her what he had to say, and that she would make up her mind in due time; he had promised she should not be pressed or hurried. For himself he was content to wait, more than content. He cancelled his passage to Nigeria, and took rooms in the "Albany." He was living in them when the great entertainment took place at Stone House.

Even in those days of elaborate entertainments, lavish expenditure on flowers and food, on music and the engagement of great artists, the reception given at Stone House was spoken of as promising to be unique. It was the Wagners' first season in Stone House, and Lœtitia meant to make it memorable. Although she had hoped for a ducal alliance for her stepdaughter, she was becoming satisfied with the one in sight.

Stone House, thrown open for the first time on this occasion, and resplendent, was found to have had all the embellishment lavished upon it that the imagination of the most glorified upholsterer, with Sir Hubert's banking account to enliven it, could contrive. The hall was of blue marble, enriched with golden mouldings. From fluted columns of this same marble, drawn from a quarry in South America, exploited for the purpose, and new

to the *cognoscenti,* the great staircase rose, leading to billiard-room, banqueting-hall and picture-gallery.

The banqueting-hall was of cedar wood and silver, the design of the ceiling copied from one of the rooms in the Doge's Palace in Venice. Cunning employment of electric light turned the silver to rose grey, and silver and rose deepened in the tone of the carpet, specially woven for the hall. Lady Wagner would, of course, have preferred gold to silver in the enrichment of the ceiling, but yielded to expert advice.

On this great night thirty people, among whom was Lord Lyssons, sat down to dinner under the cedar and silver ceiling. A prince of the blood sat by Lœtitia's side. He was only Prince Basil Francis of Helstig-Scholstein, but to Lœtitia it was sufficient that he was Royalty. He was known to be musical, and the concert after the dinner had been arranged for his edification. The knowledge of how much money it was to cost, that every performer was a star, sustained Lœtitia through the dinner.

Prince Basil Francis of Helstig-Scholstein was very poor, and unusually stupid, even for a prince. He did not know why he was here, but, then, he very seldom knew why he was anywhere. Nevertheless, he said the right things to his hostess; he had said them so often before that they came quite easily to him. It was unfortunate that it was June, and there were no luxuries out of season. A year ago, in March, in their hired house in St. James's Square, when the American Ambassador dined with them, there had been, to eclipse the freak dinners of fable or America, an immense effort made to induce a couple of tame plovers to lay prematurely, and apparently the Wagner money had proved too great a temptation.

But to-night there was no eccentricity, wiser counsels having prevailed. Of course, the asparagus was of the giant variety, the strawberries British Queens, and the wines of unexceptionable vintage. The Prince's appetite was likewise remarkable, *kolossal,* in the language of his fatherland. He even asked, and Lœtitia looked upon

it as a command, that one dish—*canard* with a *mousse* of *foie gras*—should be handed again. Lœtitia was highly gratified, if secretly surprised. She had a vague idea that a small appetite was a sign of good birth.

After dinner she stood at the head of the splendid staircase, in grey satin and grey wig, diamond tiara, immense pearls, and dignity, to receive the guests that were coming for the concert and supper. There was no crush—there could not be a crush in Stone House—but everyone who was anyone came. The Duke and Duchess of Balderstone, the old Dowager, the Fallowfields; the Honourable Gilbert Talbooth, with long hair and the reputation of a poet; Lord Chetwode, with neither hair nor reputation; Lords and Ladies; the Inchestres, the Thesils; *débutantes* and dowagers, old stagers and young. Some were amused at finding themselves here, and said so, almost under the eyes of their hostess. As a matter of fact, one was here because the other was; they were only sheep, Lady Sallust being the bell-wether. The engagement between Lord Lyssons and the only daughter of the house was not yet announced, but it was in the air. Manuella was by her stepmother's side at the top of the stairs.

The picture-gallery was even more superb than the banqueting-hall; the very walls were gold, and golden, too, the domed ceiling; only the pictures broke the Midas charm. They were reputed old masters, and prodigious prices had been paid for them. Here the blue of the Virgin's gown caught the eye, and there the gold of the Child's halo outshone the gold of walls and ceiling. But, for the most part, it was the frames that stood out conspicuously upon the walls.

To-night there was a platform, with footlights, and a grand piano at the end of the gallery. Powdered footmen handed satin programmes. An arm-chair, gilded and cushioned, was provided for the Prince, and a similar one beside him for Lady Wagner. All the chairs were gilded, but these were the only two with arms. Waldo, coming up late from the dinner-table, had some difficulty

in finding Manuella among the crowd. He whispered to her in a ribald manner that a bed or sofa would be better than a chair for Prince Basil Francis.

"He is somnolent with satiety and champagne. I bet you half a dozen pairs of gloves he is asleep before the Trio."

It was by the Prince's wish that the Tschaikowsky "Trio" was to be played. Lyssons had laughed when he heard this, for the intimation of His Highness's wishes came from the impresario who arranged the concert.

The "Trio" was the most incongruous item on that satin programme, which in itself was even more amazing than the distinguished names implied; not a number cost less than three figures, and it was rumoured that the "Trio" ran into four! Certainly Steinhault was playing, and he had never before been heard in a private house in England.

It was to be performed after supper. This had been arranged with the view of keeping the Prince in Stone House as long as possible. People would be coming and going all the time, and Lœtitia wished that everyone should see him there. Here is the programme. Its significance will be seen later.

PART I

1. Pianoforte Solo — Barcarolle — Chopin.
   PAUL STEINHAULT.
2. Song — "Un bel di vedremo" (Madame Butterfly) — Puccini.
   MADAME LIEBIUS.
3. Dance — MADAME PALESTRINA.
   (By the courtesy of the Manager of the Palace Theatre.)
4. Recitation from "La Glu" — Jean Richepin.
   MADAME YVONNE COLBERT.

PART II

1. Sea Pictures — (*a*) "Where Corals lie" (*b*) "The Raven" — Elgar.
   MADAME CLARA CUE.

2. Trio "Trio in A Minor" Tschaikowsky.
MM. JACQUES ZEISLER, PAUL STEINHAULT and ISIDOR VESCI.

3. Song "Sì, mi chiamano Mimì" (La Bohème) Puccini.
MADAME LIEBIUS.

4. Violin Solo Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso Saint-Saëns
HERR ZEISLER.

Palestrina was the greatest of all Russian dancers. Yvonne Colbert had come from Paris for this one engagement only at a phenomenal fee. The two great cantatrices, Madame Liebius and Madame Clara Cue, had never previously sung together at a concert. Zeisler and Vesci, incomparable violinist and renowned violoncellist, stood alone each in his class.

Paul Steinhault! Paul Steinhault is the pianist before whom, according to the very latest audacity in musical criticism, Paderewski is a mere amateur, and Rubenstein was but a tinkler on the keys. The whole of musical London was agog to hear him, but he had always refused to appear in a country that had allowed a Davison to malign a Wagner. It is possible he thought the South African millionaire was a relative of the Divine Master, and that so he was assisting at a great *festa* of reparation. It is also possible that he could not withstand the fee.

The Prince settled himself in the gilded and cushioned chair, and Lady Wagner took her place beside him. Seats were found for lesser people; there was a rustle of programmes and silken dresses, with buzzing of talk and exclamation. This was to be like no other concert.

The impresario was, however, the first performer to appear. He came on to the platform and made a little speech:

"Your Highness, Ladies and Gentlemen. . . ."

It appeared that Steinhault had not yet arrived. Herr Zeisler would therefore give the first item.

In another minute Zeisler, thickset and plebian in appearance, but smiling and assured, stood before them.

How lovingly he adjusted the strings, caressing them almost. Under his fat, stumpy fingers the music danced and sang, cried and laughed lightly. What a genius the man was! The Prince said so, and led the applause.

Lord Lyssons was not musical, and to-night he could think of nothing but Manuella. In truth, she looked beautiful; on her slender girlish neck the lovely-shaped head, with its coronal of dark hair, rose gracefully. She had little colour, and even her lips seemed pale; but without colour her contours seemed more exquisite, the small cleft chin, the thin bow mouth, the delicate nose. The lashes lay shadowy on her ivory cheeks, underneath them her eyes were darkly brilliant.

"You can't want to listen; come away and talk."

"Can't want to listen! Why, it's Zeisler!"

Manuella loved music; once—a thousand years ago it seemed now—she had wanted to be a great singer. At Fontainebleau her singing master said she had a wonderful voice. It was, however, not only because she was musical, and wanted to hear, not merely Zeisler, but Madame Liebius and Clara Cue, that she stayed where she was.

An extraordinary shyness of Lord Lyssons had come upon her now; she was for ever conscious of him, of his presence in a room, his presence in her thoughts; but she evaded the knowledge that was knocking at her heart.

Supper was served at small tables between the two parts of the concert. Now everybody was eating lobster in aspic, quail or truffled chickens, drinking champagne or hock; there was a rattle of glasses and plates, with the hum and buzz of talking. It was perhaps only Waldo who noted a man approach and whisper something in Sir Hubert's ear. Manuella was at her father's table with the wizened ambassador who stood next to the Prince in distinction. And where Manuella sat or stood, there were Lord Lyssons' eyes.

Sir Hubert, for once forsaking *régime,* was eating and drinking like an ordinary human being, talking, too, and

at ease. But that which was whispered in his ear evidently annoyed him; he frowned and showed impatience. Then he spoke to Manuella, who left her chair and the room, evidently at his request. Waldo followed her; he had not yet sat down to supper.

"Anything the matter?" he asked.

"Steinhault has not come, there is no one for the piano, and they don't know what to do about the Trio. You know it was by Prince Basil's special request. I am to go up to the artists' room, to try and arrange something. . . ."

"By the time the Prince has finished supper I don't believe he will know one tune from another. Come and talk to me instead; I haven't had a word with you for ages."

"Don't call the Trio a 'tune.'" She tried to speak flippantly, but her nervousness was apparent, and her desire to escape from him.

"I'll call it what you like."

"Let me go, I must do what father wants."

"I am not to have a word, then?"

"After supper; after I've seen what is to be done; after——"

"I'll take it out of you one day, see if I don't. I'll talk to you for twenty-four hours without stopping—thirty-six if you are not good."

He wanted to keep his arm about her waist, and look into her eyes when he threatened her, to see them brighten, darken, fall before his own. But there were perspiring butlers and hurrying footmen about, and he released her, and returned to the supper-room. His heart was light; he did not think he would have long to wait now. They were so near to an understanding. At any moment now there might leap between them the word, the glance, illuminating them to each other. Her very shyness with him was indicative of what was happening, that she was awaking. Love was a flame, and he might kindle it at any moment. But

she was so young, he could hardly bear that she should burn.

"Champagne, my lord?" He found himself sitting in her vacant place beside Sir Hubert.

"In a tumbler, and a large piece of ice. Glad to see for once that you are indulging," he said to his future father-in-law.

Sir Hubert surveyed his truffled chicken gloomily. "I expect I shall have to pay for it in the morning," he said. "My only possible chance was if my mind had been undisturbed whilst I ate and drank. Now comes this news. I'm sure I don't know why Steinhault hasn't come. I gave him his own terms. I shall be ill to-morrow, very ill."

"Perhaps not. And, if so, it will be in a good cause," Waldo answered cheerfully. "I should go the whole hog if I were you, since you have started—lobster, quail, peaches, and a bottle or two to top up with. You may as well be hung for a Périgord pie as a lamb cutlet, as the old proverb says. As for the programme or any alteration, what's the odds? Nobody listens to music after supper."

"The Prince wanted to hear Steinhault and Zeisler together," Sir Hubert reiterated irritably. "Manuella will have to see that a motor is sent for him."

He was, however, very much inclined to take Lord Lyssons' advice, since it was certain he would be ill anyway.

"I have heard that music has sometimes a very extraordinary effect on the digestion; they have been making experiments—you've heard about them, I suppose?"

Waldo supped to an *obbligato* of medical details.

CHAPTER VII

ON the threshold of the artists' room, leading from the great picture-gallery, Manuella paused. It must be remembered that the greater part of her youth had been passed in Germany, where music has its home, is understood, revered, invites and receives homage. For a short time, never to be forgotten, she had been encouraged to hope that she, too, might one day be an artist. Tremulous days had been hers, for the country that music opened to her, with the language that music speaks, had ever been enchanted land. Since childhood's days she had heard the voices of fauns and fairies on dappled sward; through swaying trees and sunlight Orpheus had played to her intent ears. Sometimes there had been thunder and lightning in that enchanted land, and then it was the gods who spoke. All this was for her dreams alone, and never, never had she voiced it until one day, not six months ago, at Fontainebleau she had sung to Monsieur Lausan, who taught only the first class, and who had declared that her voice was wonderful, and she must be an artist! Two months of Monsieur Lausan's teaching, of high hopes and glorious excitement, and then the summons home, the imperative peremptory summons. It seemed so long ago . . . so impossible she could have ever hoped to be a singer.

It all rushed back to her, those exalted days and dreams, as she stood at the door of the artists' room,

almost afraid to enter. Zeisler and Liebius and Vesci were there. Something from the past, some reverence or memory, made the intake of her breath quick, and she hesitated on the threshold.

She saw Zeisler first—Zeisler, whom she had heard in Germany, and idealized, with whom she and all her schoolfellows had said they were in love. He had been a doctor and then a soldier, they were told, but always a genius. She would have liked to make a reverence to him; she hardly dared to look him in the face. That little fiddle he carried, how she had heard it speak and sing! There was no one like Zeisler. Again she was in that big hall in Dresden; the girls in their white dresses, tier upon tier of silent people, then his figure on the platform, the awkward figure; the violin tuning and scraping, and then . . . then . . . such music as she had never heard, only dreamed. . . . It was really an obeisance she made to Zeisler, and not a formal bow. They saw it, those artists, and their hearts went out to her.

At first it seemed as if all who were in the room were talking at once, and she could not make out what was being said. Zeisler was the calmest; he was not satisfied with one of his strings, and tried it with his finger-nail, and then again, testing the strings all the time the others talked. But Isidor Vesci was vociferous and excitable, and Flockmann, who had engaged the artists for the concert, and represented the firm that had engaged them, was full of explanations and apologies, and could have made matters clear to her if Vesci had not screamed him down.

Zeisler said quickly, as if to himself or his bow:

"But like this they will never make her understand."

And although the explanations, half in Italian, and all in chorus, rose and rose again, it was a few minutes before she knew what had happened; that Steinhault, the great Steinhault, had not only not come, he had neither wired, nor written, nor telephoned! Nothing had been heard of him since he had accepted the engage-

ment and Flockmann had arranged for Zeisler and Vesci to play with him.

Vesci was gesticulative and violent. He would not have played at all at such a concert, to such an audience, if it had not been for Steinhault. With Steinhault at the piano he would play the Tschaikowsky Trio here, anywhere, and even forego his right to be heard in a solo. He ignored the fact that he was to have two hundred guineas for his complaisance. He said dreadful things about her father's guests, who had moved in their seats, who had even rustled their dresses, when Zeisler was playing the Rondo. He was convinced that Steinhault had seen the programme, the indefensible programme, and had not come because he resented being set down to open it; he, the great Steinhault, to commence a millionaire's private concert! So he abused Flockmann.

It seemed to Manuella as if everyone in the artists' room was talking at the same moment, and that most of them were saying the same thing; only Zeisler went on adjusting his strings, humming a little under his breath. And a vulgar American woman, whom she heard afterwards was Madame Vesci, was saying louder and more often than all the rest, that the Trio could not be given without Steinhault, that Vesci would not play with anyone else. Flockmann suggested this man or the other being sent for—great pianists, all of them, he said, as he shrieked their names at Vesci, ran his hands through his dishevelled hair, and was distractedly watching the door, always hoping that at the very last minute Steinhault would arrive.

Near the door there was a grand piano. Seated on the music-stool was a young man who touched the keys softly all the time, as Zeisler touched his strings, saying nothing. He had accompanied Madame Liebius in her song. Manuella remembered his head. That was all she had seen of him, although she was musician enough to recognize how fine an accompanist Madame Liebius had secured, how gently his fingers caressed the keys, how the piano supported her, rising and falling with the voice,

just as an accompaniment should rise and fall, deepening values, adding richness, never obtrusive, always subordinate.

She had noticed vaguely that it was a fine and massive head, crowned with hair the colour of ripened corn. Now, but equally vaguely, she was surprised to see how young he was, little more than a boy. His small ears lay flat, his shoulders were a little bowed, his eyes were on the keys.

She wished all the others were not talking at once. Flockmann and Vesci, ignoring her, were still shouting at each other. Only Zeisler played with his fiddle, and the young man at the piano touched a note now and again in accidental harmony. When the confusion was at its height, and she felt her intelligence and capacity drowning in the noise, he ceased fingering the piano, and swung himself round on the stool. She became conscious he was speaking to her, softly, under cover of the noise.

"I saw you in the audience, did I not? When I was playing '*Un bel di vedremo*'? You love music, I saw. After that I played it for you."

"For me!"

"But, of course. Now I want to play the Tschaikowsky Trio for you. Will you tell them to cease wrangling, cease talking, and I will play! If you would tell them that. . . ."

For the moment she was uncertain how to answer him; she hesitated, not knowing him, nor the etiquette of the occasion.

"But certainly I can play it," he said earnestly, misreading her hesitation.

As he looked at her she saw that his eyes were blue, and in the middle of each of them was a strange light; afterwards she knew it was the light of genius. Even now she saw that it was not self-confidence that lit them, for that is a small and feeble thing; they were compelling eyes, double-irised, strange.

"I can play it for them, no one better; only Steinhault can play it as well as I."

"But who . . . what . . . what shall I tell them?"

She moved nearer the piano, by now the dispute between the two men was hotter and more vociferous and no one heeded her, although they knew she was here to assuage it.

"Tell them that Harston Migotti will play the Trio with them."

"Will they know . . . will they be satisfied?"

"They will not know, perhaps. Only Madame Liebius here knows. But they will be satisfied, completely satisfied. I promise it you. Do not be afraid, tell them."

"Now?"

"Yes. Now! It does not matter what they say; afterwards they will be glad."

It was a strange, a difficult position for her. How could she say it, or insist? And yet he impressed her with his power, with his conviction. He was little more than a boy, two or three-and-twenty at the most. His face was as smooth as a girl's, classic in its fine features and sculptured lines. Her hesitation was not shared by him.

"Go on. Say it to them," he urged, smiling at her. "Do not be afraid."

"Herr Zeisler, Signor Vesci."

She held up her hand to ask for silence, but she was pleading, not commanding, as perhaps she had the right. Because she had curtsied low to Zeisler, not at all because she was her father's daughter, first Vesci, and then the others, gave her the opportunity she asked.

"I want you to allow . . . will you allow this gentleman to play the pianoforte part in the Trio in Herr Steinhault's place? It is Signor Harston Migotti. . . ."

There fell a little doubtful hush over them, and it was almost a moment before Vesci repeated the name, and Flockmann after him.

"Migotti?"

"*Migotti?*"

He did not rise from the stool, but swung lightly on it, facing them.

"Not 'Signor.' I am an Englishman," he corrected. She had made the opportunity, and now he spoke for himself. "Since Steinhault, who was my master, is not here, I will play the Trio, if you care that I shall." He spoke confidently; and although he said he was an Englishman there was something foreign in the inflexion of his voice.

It was a difficult, and in some ways, an embarrassing position for the girl. Zeisler looked at her inquiringly, then he turned to the boy at the piano. Vesci continued to talk furiously, and Flockmann seemed too astonished for speech.

"I have never heard of you," he said, after a pause.

Migotti shrugged his shoulders.

"No?" he said laconically; and for no apparent reason he smiled again at Manuella, as if she, too, must be amused at that.

"Where have you played? You have never been heard. . . ."

"Nevertheless, I can play the Trio."

He rose now, and one saw that the promise of the head was not quite carried out by the figure. Like Zeisler's, it was a little clumsy, loose, not well-knit, his clothes were ill-fitting.

"Would I say it if it were not true? In ten minutes you would know. I will play it, but only if Herr Zeisler and Signor Vesci are content, and Mademoiselle wishes it." He was certainly not pleading. "It is for you I will play it," he said again to Manuella.

Now it seemed that Zeisler was listening to him. And Zeisler, moved one knows not by what impulse, the girl's doubting eyes, the boy with his Beethoven head, conviction, indifference, or merely in contradiction of Vesci's wife, who continued to scream that only a Steinhault, a Paderewski, or a Bauer could play with Vesci—said, quite laconically, as he took out a new string:

"Let him play; I will play with him."

Vesci's face was a study. Flockmann threw up his hands. Migotti sat down again on the piano-stool, and

Zeisler, after another glance at him, continued to tune his violin.

When Manuella left the artists' room she became again uncertain of the wisdom of what she had done.

To Lord Lyssons, to whom she voiced her doubts, it appeared of little consequence either way. She told him how good-looking the boy was, and that he had a true musician's head. He rallied her about him, and said there was no doubt his good looks, or that "light in his eyes" which she described, had made a great impression upon her.

"I'm only worried because of Zeisler, it would be so awful if he were put out. Perhaps I ought to have left it to Flockmann."

"I meant to go downstairs and have a smoke, but I shall stay here instead, and support you if there is a fiasco. Did you say Adonis or Julius Cæsar, Beethoven or Svengali? Tell me some more about your find."

He rallied her lightly at first, but found within himself the capacity for jealousy; urging her to come away, not to bother any more about the concert.

"He has one of the most beautiful faces I have ever seen."

He could not get her away from the subject, nor from the hall.

"I must hear him; he asked me to stand where he could see me, he said he would play it to me."

Although music bored or irritated him, Waldo stayed. If it was not a vague and reasonless jealousy it was difficult to say why he resented her interest in the Trio.

Prince Basil Francis had eaten to repletion, and was somnolent, as Waldo had predicted, but did not suggest leaving, as Lady Wagner had feared.

"Isn't Zeisler going to play again? I must hear Zeisler," he said.

And Lady Wagner could not congratulate herself sufficiently on having secured just that particular musician. The Prince said there was no one like him; he often

heard him in Darmstadt. Lady Wagner, holding on to her decorum with both hands, bemused at the success of her party, and in the prim intoxication with her position, could not remember what instrument Zeisler played, or if he perhaps danced, or sang in a "new ditty" every evening. That was a most improper suggestion that some one had made about an artiste, a "nudity" every evening! In her nervousness she had almost repeated the jest to the Prince, but recollected herself in time. Her satin programme told her Zeisler was the name of the violinist. Of course, they would never have engaged two dancers for an evening.

Lady Wagner, back in her upholstered chair by the side of the Prince, waited to see what was going to happen on the stage. She heard there had been a disappointment about the Trio, and hoped that in its place someone would sing an English song, such as "She wore a Wreath of Roses," or "The Better Land." Her extra glass of champagne, or the society of the Prince, had mounted to her head. Her nose was a little pink under the diamond tiara, and she felt sentimental.

Prince Basil Francis thought she was a bore. He said if she wished to be with her other guests, perhaps Miss Wagner would take her place; she was not to feel tied. He had an eye for a pretty girl, and sometimes wished modern German ideas admitted the provision of a harem for the younger sons of the royal house. Nevertheless, he had done very well without such provision. He was a little sleepy from his good supper, following so closely on his good dinner. But Zeisler was always worth hearing.

"Let them begin. Why do they not begin?" he asked, and added, hardly concealing a yawn, that "it was getting late."

Everybody knew Zeisler and Vesci. Steinhault, apart from his reputation, was personally a stranger to England. No one suspected there was a substitute at the piano, although many thought he looked young, so much younger than seemed possible. Manuella, when the tuning and the adjustment of the piano-stool came to an end,

found herself near to the platform. She stood, as she had promised, where the young pianist could see her. She was extraordinarily eager that he should succeed. Waldo was struck by her expression.

He thought he had never seen her look so, he could not find the exact word, but "exalted" was the nearest he could supply. Her eyes were as lamps that had been newly-lit. Into her pallor had crept a flush—the flush he had seen come sweetly into her cheeks when he kissed her. Her lips were a little parted. *Expectancy.* He had found the word he wanted, and saw it typified in her. She stood quite still and expectant. He wished he could have her painted, just like that, but waiting for him and not for the music.

Flockmann appeared first on the platform to arrange the chairs. His intention had been to turn over the leaves for Steinhault; of course, he would not do that for this boy, this Migotti, whoever he might be, about whom he was doubtful, if not contemptuous. Zeisler, carrying his Stradivarius, came in after the 'cello had been placed. Vesci, insignificant, apelike in his ugliness, took his seat, and drew the big instrument nearer to him. The boy, with no trace of nervousness, followed the others, forgot to bow to the company, took his seat at the piano and began to run his fingers along the keys so naturally, so lightly, that Manuella's anxiety and fears were suddenly stilled. He was going to give them music—"the magic of music."

Music and love were inseparable in that wild heart which her stepmother said was so ill-regulated; she stood within the precincts of an enchanted land; already the scented wind from it was blowing to her. All that evening she had been conscious of a strange excitement; Waldo's breath on her cheek gave her the same thrill as sunlit trees, dancing elves and fairies in dreamland. And now, in a moment, as they began to play, her heart was more tumultuous; the sough of the wind in the trees came to her, she saw sunlight and shadow glorifying the sward, and all the greys and greens were melody.

She drew nearer to the platform, leaning against the great palm at the end of the bank of flowers. It was not of Harston Migotti she was thinking, the boy at the piano, who, when the first movement was finished, forgot to acknowledge the plaudits. Lord Lyssons misread her expression; she was listening, it was true, but she was unconscious of the performers; not unconscious of Waldo's eyes, although she avoided them. She had promised to talk with him after supper; this music was the prelude to their talk.

Zeisler and Vesci bowed in acknowledgment of the applause, but the boy kept his place unmoved. He had only looked up with that transfiguring light upon his face, and smiled into her eyes. Lord Lyssons saw it, to Manuella it was quite impersonal. There was no question in Migotti's eyes, only assurance, and a smile was about his lips. It is true they were like Beethoven's —well-cut, a little thick, firm in his hairless young face. Zeisler looked at him and nodded his head, saying a word under his breath.

Now the second movement began, the rich variations of the second movement. In the first the violin had sung and danced, and the 'cello had been the wind in the trees; the piano was only then an undercurrent, as moving waters lapping, water falling, moving waters that might swell to flood. But in the second part, in those wonderful variations, the piano led the 'cello, and the violin was only a beam that danced upon the waters . . . the air changed and changed, but always it was the deep notes of the piano that swelled triumphantly, and dominated each movement. Now their eyes met, not hers and Waldo's, but the eyes of the boy who played, and the girl who listened. And after that it was upon her heart he played. She did not know what had happened, nor what barriers were being thrown down. Only that all the barriers were down, and there was nothing between her and music. There were mysteries, and he at the piano knew them. They were falling like water from his fingers, and the melody he was pouring into her heart

was greater than she could bear, and yet she knew she could never again bear to be without it. It was ecstasy, it was passion torn to tatters, it was beyond her strength, it was beyond human endurance. And then, when she had gone so pale that Waldo, watching, thought she would faint, the movement changed again, into melancholy; melancholy into majesty. The end, the end of everything was coming; the end of everything had come; his fingers crashed upon the keys.

There was a moment's hush before the applause followed. The great picture-gallery was half empty now; only those who really cared for music had stayed to hear the Trio. Prince Basil Francis, notwithstanding Lœtitia's deference to him, was a very minor royalty, and not one for whom it was necessary to wait. They had gone out one by one, in pairs and groups, without taking leave of their hostess. Those who remained had been spellbound, not as Manuella was perhaps, but as connoisseurs, critics.

Prince Basil Francis forgot both his rank and his supper; he applauded with hands and feet and stentorian thick voice. Never had he heard the Trio played like that before. Never would it be played to him again as it was played that night.

"*Kolossal! kolossal!*" he cried. "Bravi! Bravi!"

He rose from his gilded chair; he called to Zeisler above the intervening bank of flowers and spoke to him in German. Zeisler put both his feet together, gave that stiff little bow of his, and answered in the same language. Then, great man, great genius that he was, he went back a few steps, to the boy at the piano, putting a hand upon his shoulder, urging him. He was unwilling, but Zeisler insisted upon leading him forward.

"Your Highness, it is he, it is he who played the Trio."

Zeisler said it, and Migotti shook his head. The Prince spoke in German; Zeisler again patted Migotti's shoulder, then kissed him—kissed him before them all! But the young pianist seemed indifferent to their praise, smiling only at Manuella, a little triumphantly. Lord Lyssons saw it. It was as if he would have said: "It was for

you I played." Waldo surmised the words upon his lips.

"They won't stay for anything else," Waldo said to her. "The Prince is on the move already. Come upstairs." He put his hand on her arm. "I have not had that word with you."

"Not now."

She shrank from him, because now, although she had no words for it, or formula, she knew that she loved him; that boy had taught it her with his wonderful playing.

"You don't want to hear any more, do you?" Lord Lyssons asked her.

"No."

Her head felt light and rather strange, her heart overfull, and fearful. But she was happy, amazingly happy, and softened—softened to saying it. Only there was no opportunity. Perhaps she could have made one, or he, if he had understood. There were departing guests, and in that large house it would surely have been possible to find solitude. He should have kissed her then, taken her in his arms, entered into his kingdom. It was Harston Migotti's playing that threw it open to him, but it was his for all that, only his.

"I didn't know you were such a musical enthusiast. Was it the music, or the young man with the flowing locks?" he asked her, as they stood at the top of the stairs, and the people swept past them toward the cloakroom or their carriages.

"I—I love it." Her voice was low, lips a little tremulous, heart wildly fluttering. Lœtitia caught sight of them, and intimated that the Prince wished to take his leave of Manuella. She curtsied low to him, and then it seemed the room and the people were swaying about her.

"My love, the Duchess."

"Miss Wagner is overtired, I think." Waldo saw she had grown very pale, was overcharged with emotion; it was he who obtained her release from her social duties.

"Run away up to bed, you won't be missed now. I'll see you in the morning."

CHAPTER VIII

IT was from that night all the misunderstandings dated, although they came about gradually and without natural sequence.

Lord Lyssons made his formal proposal the next day; it was difficult to say what urged him to do it at that particular moment. Perhaps he thought he could woo her better as her fiancé than as merely an aspirant to her hand; perhaps he wanted to free himself and her from Lœtitia; perhaps, although it seemed incredible, he really thought she was attracted by the young musician, and so wished to make himself secure. In any case, he had an interview with Sir Hubert Wagner, was accepted, and the lawyers set to work.

Instead of being more, they were less, together; they were hardly ever alone. Trousseau intervened and dressmakers; it was worse than before the presentation. Every hour seemed to be occupied. Manuella was for ever dressing and undressing, being tried on, interviewed, seeing fresh people, *corsetières,* women with boxes of lace and embroidered underwear, perspiring furriers in white smocks, tailors with pins in their mouths and chalk in their pockets. There was no talk, no leisure; the days came and were gone, leaving on their ebb-tide rich things which neither of them wanted. Wedding invitations had been sent out, and gorgeous presents arrived daily. Glowing descriptions of her trousseau were in all the

papers; the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Mirror* and the weekly press vied with each other in their accounts of the famous Lyssons' sapphires that were being reset, of the priceless Russian sable coat Sir Hubert was giving his daughter, of the parure of diamonds from Cartier that was her stepmother's gift. The public interest was supposed to be divided between the particulars of all this magnificence, and stories and portraits of the starving children of the coal miners, who were again on strike. Equal journalistic space was given to both.

Outwardly Manuella was uncertain in temper, shy when with her lover, or flippant. Within, she was distraught, fearful, trembling. She was living in dreamland, or cloudland, with rare moments of exquisite happiness and reactions. She could not believe in what had come to her; she shrank from the dazzling splendour of love. Waldo, too, was living on surfaces, whimsical, witty, or merely frivolous. He loved her enough to wish she should not know how great was his love, at least, not yet. His own nights were sleepless, or filled with snatches of short, unrestful sleep. He was on fire with her, but he did not wish that she should burn. Not yet. In six weeks, four weeks, three weeks, she would be his, to teach and assuage, to love all he would. He was sorry for her because he was going to teach her love, exquisitely tender in his thoughts, a true and passionate lover.

Manuella, living through those overfull days and restless nights, looked pale, thin, ill. They put it down to the hot weather, the strain of her first season, the excitement of the coming wedding.

"She will be all right after the fourteenth," Lady Wagner told everyone reassuringly, with that maddeningly pleasing smile of hers. "These are very exciting times. The Prince has sent an inkstand. . . ."

She was full of the presents, and the company who would assemble at St. George's, amazingly glad of the prospect of getting the girl off her hands and in so satisfactory a manner.

Three weeks before the wedding came the Buckingham

Palace garden-party. Naturally Lady Wagner would not miss such a function, and Manuella would of course accompany her. Lord Lyssons suggested at lunch-time that it might prove fatiguing, but Lœtitia overruled his objections. The frock of *broderie anglaise,* the large leghorn hat with the pink ostrich feathers, were eminently suitable for the occasion, and Manuella left the lunch table to don them.

Lady Wagner was already arrayed in lavender silk. Sir Hubert, for once evading the city, was coming home to accompany them. At four o'clock punctually he appeared in the great hall in all the glory of his grey frock-coat and white waistcoat, grey trousers and white spats. In the background his valet held the shining hat and gold-mounted stick. The motor puffed at the open door.

At the very last moment Manuella's French maid came running down to say that when Miss Wagner was fully dressed, not five minutes ago, in fact, she had been taken ill—fainted! She was already better, but it was impossible she should accompany them. She had bidden her say it was nothing. By the evening she would be well again, but for this afternoon she begged they would excuse her.

Sir Hubert was for summoning a doctor. He suggested that either he or Lady Wagner should go upstairs to see the girl. He was sure she must have eaten something that had disagreed with her. He went over the lunch menu, and questioned the maid as to her symptoms in a way Lady Wagner considered somewhat gross. He strongly recommended bi-carbonate of soda. Lady Wagner glanced at the Buhl clock, hesitated, then decided to restrain her step-maternal anxiety until the evening. It was certain the Queen would miss them if they were not at the garden-party; and one could not disappoint Royalty. Lady Wagner was quite genuine in her belief that they would be missed.

"Tell Miss Wagner that I will see her immediately we return. In the meantime the quieter she keeps the better.

Darken the room, do not disturb her until five. Then you might take her a cup of tea and the bi-carbonate of soda Sir Hubert suggests."

Lœtitia was nothing if not precise. She gave her instructions, exhibiting sufficient solicitude. The mauve costume, accompanied by the frock-coat and white waistcoat, drove off, and Claire repaired to the servants'-hall, or the housekeeper's-room, to refresh herself after the fright her young mistress had given her.

"I thought she had died in my arms. She was white like a sheet, and so cold. . . ."

In the servants'-hall they gossiped about the marriage, and it was agreed that the Earl was too old for his bride, and not sufficiently attentive.

Manuella's room was not darkened, and the cup of tea was never brought to her. The household relaxed when the door closed behind master and mistress.

As there was no one with the girl, and she was given no remedies, she recovered quickly from her faint. She took off her hat, letting down her hair to relieve the weight upon her head, rolling it up again presently in a simpler fashion. It became her better this way, but she did not think of that. She did not think at all, she was incapable of thought. She sat for a little while at the open window of her bedroom, and then went downstairs. She was shaky and pale after her attack of faintness, and there was a singing in her ears. The singing in her ears presently resolved itself into melody, a haunting strain, something of which she must rid herself, to which she must give expression.

There was no piano in her own sitting-room, and she wandered down to the music room. Of course the melody that was haunting her was from the second movement of the Trio. How wonderfully the young pianist had dominated it—an interesting boy. Quite idly she wondered what had become of him, and where he was playing. If it had not been for him she would not have known what was the feeling she had for Lord Lyssons. Music and love were one with her; her love had had no

expression, it was imprisoned and stifled within her, making her pulses and her breath irregular. She wanted to tell Waldo, but she had never told him; he had never asked her if she cared for him. It seemed impossible that in three weeks they would be married! The blood rushed into her face when she remembered it. Then she began to play. She would have sung, there was song in her heart, but her uneven pulses shook her voice.

It was an untrained underfootman who played Providence or Improvidence, the part for which he was cast in the drama of her story. The part would never have fallen to him but for the laxity that fell upon the establishment in the absence of master and mistress.

"If you please, miss. . . ."

The butler may have been at his bookmaker's, the first footman pursuing Claire in the servants'-hall, the second footman waiting on the *major-domo*. This *Deus ex machina* was new to high service, a mere tyro translated from buttons. That he had seen Miss Wagner descend the stairs, and therefore knew she was at home was not legitimate knowledge, and he ought to have concealed it. To answer the door-bell at all was encroaching on another's duty. That when a bell rings it must be answered, he may have learned in Kensington or Bayswater. Having answered it, he ought to have known Lady Wagner was out, and Miss Wagner not receiving. His address was out of scale with the household to which he had the honour of being affiliated.

"If you please, miss, it's one of the gentlemen who was here the other night. He asked if you was at home, and I said you had just gone into the music-room."

Her surprised eyes told him he had bungled in some way; he fled before the consciousness of mistake, washing his hands of the incident, covering it up by flight, trusting only that it might not come to Mr. Jenkins' knowledge—Mr. Jenkins being the butler, and not above boxing his ears. He meant no harm; he sinned in ignorance.

He had led the way, and Harston Migotti followed him, naturally.

"But I interrupt you . . . you are playing." He halted at the door.

Of course she stopped playing and rose. She was surprised to see him, but she remembered him quite well; she had even been thinking of him, and of his wonderful playing, and told him so in that reprehensively impulsive way of hers.

She was deficient in the social sense; her stepmother was quite right. When he said that he had not known if he ought to call, but he wanted so much to see her again, to thank her, she neither rebuked him for his presumptuousness, nor dismissed him quickly with an easily invented excuse. She began at once to talk music to him, since she knew he was a true musician. She spoke enthusiastically of Zeisler and Madame Liebius, and was interested to hear that the great contralto was related to him. He was easy to talk to, simple and candid. She was glad to be free from her thoughts and emotions for a while. "I am not a pianist," he said, when she questioned him, "although I was with Steinhault. I am a composer."

She had never met a composer, and wanted to know how his music came to him. It did not seem vanity when he answered that it came the same way as to all the great masters. He spoke of a symphony that he had written when he was fourteen, and compared himself with Mozart.

"But in many ways, in most ways, I am like your namesake, like the great Richard Wagner. I am writing now an opera, and the libretto also."

With very little persuasion he played her a movement from the Introduction, then he repeated the *leit motif*. It was really beautiful and striking, original and even haunting, and, of course, she told him so.

"I want to hear more of it. When can I hear more of it?"

He was flattered, pleased. Already, on the night of the concert, he had thought her the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. This afternoon with the languor from her faint, her hair loose, listening to his music, she was

no less so. He called himself an Englishman, but he had had an Italian mother, who, as he told Manuella later on, had "lost everything for love."

He permitted himself to fall in love now, although he knew Miss Wagner was fiancée, and not for him in any case. He played her the great song from the second act of his opera—a passionate invocation.

"I wish I could sing it," she exclaimed, and told him that once she had wished to be an opera singer.

"But why not? I am sure you can sing my music." He encouraged her, struck the notes singly, and then left off to tell her how it had come to him, and that it was a great English opera he was writing; the subject was Boadicea and the Roman conquest of Britain. No, it was not like *Norma,* nor that other opera called *Boadicea,* it was an expression of rare and national character in wild forest land unreclaimed. It was easy to see that his belief in his creation was supreme.

She found his conversation fascinating; it led her into another world, one more congenial to her than this prosaic one. It was the world in which she had dwelt in her childhood's dreams.

Harston Migotti had been a "wonder child" like Mozart—an infant prodigy. His years with Steinhault had perhaps subdued him a little; but, now in England, and writing his first opera, his genius and egotism were magnetic. He carried the girl right out of herself. He was a boy on the threshold of a wonderful life. He himself told her of the wonders, dwelling on them, holding her imagination captive.

For the moment she almost forgot what it was that would make her own life equally wonderful. It had never been spoken. She thought whilst he was speaking that, in contrast to his, her life would be dull, flat, spent at dinners and garden-parties, in fine clothes, artificially smiling, perhaps, like her stepmother. Not in writing great music, or playing and singing it. What a life this inspired boy had before him! She held her breath whilst he talked.

Manuella, in her muslin embroidered frock that had been donned for the royal garden-party, her pallor, her dark eyes with their long, thick lashes, her mouth like a bow, her cleft chin, listening, listening to him as he painted that great future of his, impelled him to greater effort. It was quite involuntarily, and really because he had that great belief in himself that set him apart from other men or boys, that he exclaimed:

"But what a pity you will marry!"

When her pallor warmed she was even lovelier. He meant what a pity it was that she should marry Lord Lyssons. She was fit to be his own bride; every moment his feeling for her intensified; he knew already that he was falling deeply in love with her. But she understood him to mean that it was a pity she should marry instead of becoming a singer, and she answered soberly.

"I don't suppose my voice is really any good. I have hardly sung since I left school."

She rang for tea presently. Why not, since it was tea time, and he was here?

The butler must have been still at his bookmaker's, but the first footman was equal to his responsibilities. He supposed, if he supposed anything at all, that the music for her wedding was being arranged. He played the accordion himself in his leisure hours, and therefore knew the importance of music. He was able to report to Claire that her young lady looked better, she had quite a colour in her cheeks; "rare and handsome she looked: like mistress like maid." He was quite an eloquent first footman.

Harston Migotti drank his tea like an ordinary young man, talking all the time, eating as much cake as there was in the basket, and finishing all the bread and butter.

There was really little to excite Lœtitia's horrified exclamation when she came in from the garden-party, and heard that her stepdaughter had recovered from her faint, and was in the music-room "having tea with one of the gentlemen who played at the concert." Many things had combined to irritate her that afternoon, and this was

the culminating one. Her future son-in-law had suggested that she had not taken sufficient care of Manuella, allowing her to be ill without medical care.

Here in the music-room she found her, she who was supposed to be ill, unable to obey the Royal command, sitting with a musician—a professional musician, with long hair, in familiar intercourse, drinking tea. It was with difficulty Lœtitia kept her self-command. She always prided herself that her temper was not like Manuella's, that she was calm and dignified under any circumstances, even such as these.

"I have not the pleasure of knowing this gentleman, have I?" she began icily, after expressing her astonishment at finding Manuella recovered, not in her bedroom.

She stared at Harston, put up her glasses and surveyed him.

"I don't think I know this gentleman."

Manuella was in arms before she was attacked, it was always the way with her.

"He played in the Trio."

Lady Wagner continued to stare.

"Indeed, that is very interesting. And has anything happened? Is there any reason for this intrusion? I really do not understand, perhaps you can explain why, when we thought you were in your room—Lord Lyssons was most distressed about your condition, he is sending his own physician to see you, for he was not to be satisfied with Sir William Bellairs—I find you here, with this person . . ."

She paused as if words failed her. Migotti had risen and was now waiting for the introduction. He, of course, had no idea she meant to insult him. He said again, as he had said the other night, simply, and as if it were sufficient:

"I am Harston Migotti."

"Migotti!" She repeated the name as if it were something unclean, with a bad odour, to be held at a distance. "Migotti! Is it anything to do with the

account? Sir Hubert would prefer, I am sure, to settle through Messrs. Flockmann."

"Mr. Migotti wanted to see me again, that's why he came. It has nothing to do with the account." Manuella's face flamed, her quick temper rising. Lady Wagner put up her lorgnette, looked at her, at him, then let it fall again. She "did not know what things were coming to," she said.

"He only played to oblige us, he is not a pianist; he is a composer, a musician."

"An itinerant musician!"

Why 'itinerant' she could not explain, but the juxtaposition of the words pleased her, and she repeated them.

"An initerant musician! I am surprised, really surprised. I don't know what Lord Lyssons would say."

"Why should he say anything?"

What Lady Wagner implied was that in receiving Harston Migotti, talking to him, giving him tea, she had been guilty of something surreptitious, unlady-like, reprehensible. Manuella resented it, flamed out in his defence, although, as Lady Wagner said afterwards, he had never been attacked.

Manuella said vehemently that he was a great artist; that she was proud he wanted to see her again, proud of having tea with him. Lœtitia replied in the gentlest way possible—we have her word for this—that she "thought the servants'-hall would have been more suitable," and without giving the suggestion the slightest consideration, in the most uncalled-for way, Manuella exclaimed with reddening face that she would not allow him to be insulted. She seemed so agitated, so much more so than the occasion warranted, that Lœtitia admitted she became suspicious.

Migotti hardly understood what was being said; he was not quick to apprehend anything but praise or appreciation. Although he averred he was an Englishman, the language had difficulties for him. He misapprehended the position. It was as a guest and an equal that Lœtitia objected to his presence. He thought

this *hoch geborene Dame* already understood that he had fallen in love with her daughter, that she was quicker than he in realizing that the feeling might be mutual.

"I will go. You must not be angry with her, madam, she did not know! I have not spoken of it. I will go."

He bowed over the girl's hand; he even kissed it.

"I will come again soon."

He was gone before Lœtitia had recovered from the shock of hearing him say it. Manuella was not even conscious of the salute, she was so full of indignation against her stepmother.

CHAPTER IX

LADY WAGNER had, of course, legitimate grounds for being annoyed. She and Sir Hubert had walked in the grounds of Marlborough House almost unnoticed, unnoticed, that is, by the Royalties whom they had feared to disappoint. It was also most vexatious to find so many of their old acquaintances in the grounds and in the tents, people whom they would not welcome in Stone House. Lady Wagner thought the Royal Family wanting in discrimination, but consoled herself with the reflection that they were influenced by a Liberal Government, and that it was the Lord Chamberlain who was responsible for sending out the invitations. Lord Lyssons, who was on the watch for them, sympathized with her vexation, and confirmed her explanation. He said gravely that there was no doubt the indiscriminate hospitality that was being dispensed was directly due to Lloyd George's dictatorship.

But having fooled Lœtitia to the top of her bent, and waited to hear why Manuella was not there, he showed himself more anxious than the occasion warranted. At least, so Lœtitia told him with ponderous playfulness. He declined altogether to accept Sir Hubert's diagnosis of indigestion. Hitherto he had hardly been a person, only an alliance, and Lady Wagner had only disliked him vaguely; but this afternoon she thought him wanting not only in taste but in tact.

"She has been looking seedy for a long time. She ought to have seen a doctor. We mustn't wait any longer."

"My dear Waldo," Lœtitia spoke quite gently, although she was annoyed. "Don't you think that *I* am the best judge of whether or not Manuella requires medical attention? We mothers are very observant." It was the bland and soothing answer that should have turned away wrath.

"Quite true. But Manuella's mother has been dead for so many years that one cannot blame her for inattention. You, now, you have so many engagements; you are so occupied, worthily occupied, it is impossible you should have noticed that Manuella has grown very thin, that her colour comes and goes easily. . . ." With an effort he made his voice indifferent. "Think of her as she was when she first came home." Then he took it more lightly. "I am only marrying half the girl to whom I proposed. I am being palpably defrauded."

"I should not have been at all pleased to see Manuella grow stout. Her father would not have approved; it is a tendency with Spanish women. You know Manuella's mother was a Spaniard. Slenderness is so much more refined, and it is the vogue."

"I don't fancy standing up at the altar with a skeleton."

The sense of humour had been left out of Lœtitia's fashioning.

"My dear boy, you exaggerate things," she expostulated. "Of course, your anxiety does you credit." She became arch and gave a little pat to his arm. "It is always an agitating period in a girl's life; you must make allowances for Manuella. She is very young. We must not encourage her to think herself delicate. After the fourteenth. . . ."

"As she did not wait till after the fourteenth to have a fainting fit, perhaps it is a pity to wait until then for her to see a doctor."

Lady Wagner wanted to walk on; she saw a Duchess,

and she disliked argument. But Sir Hubert lingered, and said irresolutely:

"I think, my dear, perhaps Waldo is right. Sir William, now. . . ."

"No! No! Not that old windbag! I beg pardon, sir, I forgot you believed in him, that he attended you. But for Manuella, someone younger, less, shall we say, less eminent, would be better."

Lady Wagner went as far as she thought advisable in opposition, even further. She had, of course, noticed that Manuella looked ill since her engagement with the Duke had been broken off. But, of course, that had been entirely her own fault. Lady Wagner was tired of the girl, of the consequence her affairs were assuming. She wanted to get the wedding over and Manuella out of the way as quickly as possible. She would find it so much more agreeable to speak of "our daughter, the Countess of Lyssons," than of her as an inmate of Stone House, monopolizing attention. It was "just like the girl to faint so inconveniently, to like a fuss being made about her."

Lœtitia was angry, but neither her anger nor her obstinacy was proof against Waldo's insistence. When he saw them to the motor the last thing he said was:

"Then I'll go now and arrange for Shorter to see her."

"I suppose you must have your own way. . . ."

This smile was not "pleasing"; Lœtitia showed all her teeth, it was more like a snarl.

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This was a bad prelude to the return home, finding the girl "closeted with a strange musician." Lœtitia had fully intended drawing Manuella's attention to Lord Lyssons' evident dissatisfaction with her appearance and manner. She thought it possible that she could put the matter before her in such a way that Manuella would herself refuse to see a doctor, and assert that she was quite well. Lady Wagner was averse to the idea of

medical interference, also of being coerced or contradicted. She foresaw that even more attention would be devoted to the girl; it was possible a suggestion might be made of postponing the marriage. There is little doubt she would have succeeded in her scheme, but unfortunately, to use again Lœtitia's words:

"Because I was astonished at finding her entertaining this young man, on intimate terms with him—he was even kissing her hands—she put herself in an ungovernable temper. . . ."

The result was another fainting fit, in the midst of which Waldo walked in, unannounced, and received the foregoing explanation.

He hardly listened to it at the time; if he was conscious of a dull ache he put it down to Manuella's white rigidity, and his uneasiness about her health. He gathered there had been a scene, because Manuella had not stopped at home alone, but had received a young man. He knew well enough what young man it was she had received, although he put away the thought of it for another time. Now he was only anxious to get assistance for her.

She recovered consciousness within a few minutes, and was understood to say she was all right again, was able to go upstairs alone, and wanted no help. Lord Lyssons put a steadying arm about her, and Lœtitia improved the occasion as the lift mounted.

"If you had only been guided by me and remained in your own room. But, of course, if you had an appointment with Mr. Migotti——" Manuella did not contradict this, and Waldo noticed the omission.

When she got to her own room she begged them to leave her alone. "I am really all right," she said.

"I'll get Shorter to come at once," Waldo told Lœtitia. "I am sure that is the best thing to do."

"You must not be alarmed. She works herself up into this condition, her temper is so unfortunate. . . ." He was out of the house before she finished her sentence.

Lœtitia saw there was no use in opposing him. It would be easy to explain to the doctor when he came that

Manuella had always been hysterical and difficult to manage, that no fuss should be made about her—no unnecessary fuss.

Her task might have been easy with any other physician than Tom Shorter. She would have persuaded him to diagnose the "excitement of the coming wedding," prescribe bromide, and tide them over the next three weeks. Then Manuella would be Lord Lyssons' responsibility, and no longer hers.

Lady Wagner went into the smaller drawing-room when she heard the doctor had arrived, in all the panoply of her motherhood, still in her mauve garden-party costume, prepared to command the situation.

Dr. Shorter was a little man, but he was a little man with a big head, and an even bigger personality. Lady Wagner bowed to him condescendingly as Waldo named them to each other, and began at once:

"I hope you will say you have been sent for under false pretences, Dr. Shorter." Her smile was artificial, and her voice, to a trained observer, showed resentment. "But our bridegroom here"—now she was recovering herself and displaying pleasantry—"could not accept my assurances, would not believe in a mother's instinct."

"Where is the patient? I'm afraid I've not much time to spare." Dr. Shorter was not in the least impressed by the house or Lady Wagner, and he was too impatient to listen to her periods.

Lady Wagner was not used to being interrupted when she spoke.

"I think before you see her I must tell you something of the circumstances. . . ."

"Is the girl here?"

"She is upstairs, lying down, fully conscious, quite recovered from a slight faintness. I am sure it was unnecessary to trouble you, but Lord Lyssons was so urgent. If I tell you the symptoms, and you write a prescription for, shall we say, a little bromide? I am sure, doctor, you agree with me that bromide is *the* drug for these hysterical cases. . . ."

He had already summed her up. Not knowing the relationship, he hoped for Waldo's sake that mother and daughter were of different calibre. He and Waldo were old friends. He hated having been called here from his work, and wished the woman would leave off talking and let him see the girl, since it was for that he had come. For himself, he wanted to get through with his visit, and go on to one much more interesting; an out-patient of his hospital, to whom he had given an appointment at his own house, a man with an obscure and really interesting complaint, whose case he had been investigating for days.

But Lady Wagner was not to be hurried.

"It is, as I have already told his lordship, a little hysteria, or nervous debility, from which she is suffering. I am sure you will agree it is not at all strange under the circumstances. In my younger days we should have given valerian, but now I think bromide is the more fashionable?" She turned archly to Lord Lyssons:

"You see, I am not wholly ignorant of medicine."

"His lordship! Oh, Waldo! Well! Can I go up to her?"

"I see you are quite impatient."

She gave one of her pleasing smiles, and Dr. Shorter wondered quite suddenly, and inconsequently, how she would look without her flesh. If her teeth were her own hers might be quite a presentable skull. He lost the next sentence or two, but heard:

"She must be quite well, you know, for the fourteenth." Lœtitia was quite playful about that, and he thought her even a greater fool than she was. "I am sure you can do it if you try. You look so clever."

He seemed an extraordinary person, with no sense of social values. Yet he had spoken of Lord Lyssons as "Waldo." There was no end to the inconsistencies of the Upper Ten. It was the only one of their traits she had not been able to imitate. She herself was thoroughly consistent.

"You don't mind if I don't come up with you?"

"Oh, no, thank you; I would much rather see her alone."

A maid showed him upstairs to his patient.

Dr. Shorter, although he was insignificant from Lady Wagner's point of view, was really a remarkable person. He was a scientist, but also a humanitarian, a strange combination of gifts, and one responsible for the unique position he held. He had considerably more work than he could do at a time when most men of his age—he was not yet forty—are still engaged in wondering how and when, advertisement being forbidden them, they are to get patients to their consulting-rooms. But every patient that came to Dr. Shorter became an advertisement for him.

He was one of those men of whom there are rarely more than one in each generation, to whom his profession is at once a passion and a privilege. He lived to heal the sick.

When he entered her bedroom he saw that the girl, almost a child, who made a startled effort to rise, was sick. Of this he had no doubt. He forgot the man with the interesting kidney who was waiting for him, and all his appointments. So this was Waldo's fiancée—the daughter of that dreadful woman downstairs!

With her thick hair in two plaits, the open nightgown showing her immaturity, she looked even less than her age. She needed help and he had no doubt he could give it to her. That he misapprehended the circumstances was not wonderful. He knew about the Inland Revenue and Waldo's financial embarrassments.

Manuella had not heard she was to see a doctor; she sprang up in bed and would have remonstrated. She had a fearful headache, and only wished to be left alone. Dr. Shorter soon reassured her, bidding her lie still. Then he sat down by her side.

She said quickly she didn't want to lie down; she wasn't ill.

"Of course you are not. Who said you were? You are quite well, and you are quite happy too?"

She made no answer.

He had his hand on her pulse.

"Of course you are; so you ought to be. All young things ought to be happy, although they ought not to cry about it. You are not crying? I wonder how I made such a mistake!"

Whilst he was talking he felt her pulse, sounded her lungs, listened to her heart, made her lie back again, asking her one or two more questions.

Then, almost before she knew, under his skilful and sympathetic questioning, she was telling him of her constant sense of strangeness and unreality, the feeling of unsubstantiality in the figures about her, the uneasy nights, the days without appetite, the days when appetite would hardly be satisfied.

It would have been easy to label it hysteria, but it was not Dr. Shorter's way to take these easy paths. Physicians of the newest school would have taken a drop of the girl's blood, made a culture, and returned with a definite diagnosis of anæmia. And they would have been technically right. Dr. Shorter, acknowledging the hysterical symptoms, and admitting the anæmia, looked beyond both for the cause of either. He talked to her, leading her to talk to him, staying with her for nearly an hour. At the end of that time he knew more about her physical condition than any number of analyses would have given him. He wrote no prescription, gave her neither instructions nor advice. She was to be married in less than three weeks' time! The woman downstairs had hurried her into it. She was altogether too young, to say nothing of her being obviously anæmic, with an irregular pulse.

"You are not eighteen yet?" he asked her.

"No, not until October."

"And are you so much in love with Waldo that you could not wait?"

It was true the colour came and went fitfully, unevenly. Now she gave him a hurried look, and the flush swept from brow to chin.

"Did he say so?" she asked, then turned her head away and hid it in the pillow.

She was too young, little more than a child. This was her principal ailment, and there was only one way to cure it.

He saw quickly, with that wide, clear vision of his, that this was not a commonplace flower of a girl, who could be uprooted with impunity at such a critical moment in her growth. There was something rare and exotic in the fragrance of her youth. But it would wither, there could be no blossom from it under the treatment she was receiving. He did not divine into how rich and congenial a soil the transplantation would have been. He knew Waldo only as a hunter of big game, a humorist, not as a tender and considerate lover.

Dr. Shorter did not see Lady Wagner again. She had dressed and gone out to dinner. He left a note for her—an absurd and inconsiderate note, as Lady Wagner exclaimed when she read it:

"MADAM,

"I find your daughter anæmic and in bad condition generally. The marriage should be postponed at least three, perhaps six months, possibly a year. She must keep early hours, eat plain food, be in the open air six to eight hours a day, sleep in it if possible. She does not require any drugs. As soon as her strength permits she should have regular and ordered exercise. I am reporting also to Lord Lyssons.

"Sincerely,

"TOM SHORTER."

Lady Wagner was justly indignant with this letter; it was a bomb-shell cast into all her preparations, her summer arrangements. She only received it when she came home late that night, and it made her so angry that she had to take bromide herself to induce sleep.

At first, when she woke the next morning, she thought she would take no notice of the letter at all, but go

straight on as if nothing had happened. After she had drunk her chocolate, however, she remembered the report had gone to Lord Lyssons. She sent a note round to Lady Sallust before she got up:

"I am in dreadful trouble. Do, dear Lady Sallust, come round and talk things over with me. Or I would come to you. . . ."

The lawyers had been hard at work all these weeks; everything was in train, if not actually complete.

Lady Sallust, who was at Stone House within the hour, was almost as annoyed as Lœtitia, when she heard what had occurred, and backed her up in her decision to ignore the letter and the recommendation it contained. "Miss Wagner was quite well this morning," her maid reported; she was "already up." It would be quite easy to get a different opinion from Sir Hubert's doctor, Sir William Bellairs, who made his enormous income, and had obtained his knighthood, for prescribing to fashionable patients the change of air, or scene, or companion they desired. The two ladies decided this would be the best course to take. To send at once for Sir William, and have his authority for saying that there was no reason to postpone the ceremony, no reason at all.

Before Lady Sallust left the house an urgent messenger was dispatched. Sir William broke through his rule of never going out in the morning and came back in the motor they sent for him.

Sir William Bellairs, who was mild and spectacled and elderly, said, when Manuella came down to him, to Lady Wagner's boudoir:

"So this is the bride-elect? And she is not very well, you say? We must see what is to be done. Dear, dear, she is very thin! Undo your bodice, my dear child!"

He, too, sounded her lungs. That is to say, he rested his stethoscope on her back, whilst he exchanged amenities with Lœtitia. Afterwards he put a question or two to her, and said:

"Just so! As I thought, as I anticipated."

Lœtitia said sweetly:

"Then you agree with me, Sir William?"

And Sir William answered:

"Quite so; quite so; exactly. Now I think we will send this young lady upstairs again and have our little talk."

Manuella went upstairs again; her head still ached, and over and over again she wondered if Lord Lyssons knew she thought of him day and night, wondered about him . . . and marriage, counted the weeks and days.

But she had not wanted the marriage hastened. She was one burning blush when she thought he had attributed all this hurry to her. Of course, he did not care for her. In that angry scene downstairs, and once before, Lœtitia had let fall an unguarded word. It was because her father was giving her a fortune that he wished to marry her. It was terrible, dreadful, unbearable. She did not want to marry him if he did not care for her. She cried all that morning, and by the afternoon her headache was worse.

Meanwhile Lady Wagner "hastened to write" a charming little letter to Lord Lyssons:

"I am so glad to be able to tell you that Sir William Bellairs has been here this morning and finds very little indeed wrong with Manuella. We are going to absolve her from all her social duties between now and the fourteenth—which, I am sure, you will be delighted to hear remains the great day. But I think, perhaps, you will have to exert your authority. She must really keep quiet, there must be no more scenes, nor exciting interviews with musicians. The dear child is so impulsive, emotional. The man must have imposed upon her good nature. . . ."

She wound up in good maternal style, with a moral aphorism and a personal application, a slight expostulation, and an affectionate finale. She had always prided herself on her letters, and this one was a masterpiece. It left no room for argument. The wedding would be on the fourteenth.

CHAPTER X

IT was characteristic of Lœtitia to connect Manuella's fainting fits with the visit of Harston Migotti, and to let Lord Lyssons know it. It is not true that great love casteth out fear, or, if it be true, it is only half a truth. Unfulfilled love breeds fear. All the time Waldo had been fearful that he was too old for her, that she did not care for him, and was being rushed into it, as she had been rushed into her engagement with Calingford; that she might meet someone she liked better. He was affected by what Lœtitia hinted, and distressed by what Tom Shorter reported to him. He could not see Manuella, who was keeping to her room; he was in half a dozen minds about writing to her. Notwithstanding that reassuring letter from Lady Wagner, he really did not know what was best to be done for Manuella. He never thought about himself at all.

This was what his friend Tom Shorter had said to him:

"You can't marry the child in three weeks, she is unnerved at the prospect, and no wonder! And the sooner you let her know you have no such intention the better for you both. I don't know whether she cares for you. You must be nearly twice her age to begin with. I had a long talk with her, and still I don't know. I only know that she has been living beyond her means, beyond her physical and moral means. Her reserves have been used up by her growth, and she has come to the end

of her overdraft. She is as near bankruptcy as a girl can be. Marriage is madness for her. She ought to be running about in a pinafore with a hoop and stick."

He then went into physiological details, which made Lord Lyssons very hot and anxious to get away from him as quickly as possible. He understood he was not to see his fiancée for a few days, that she would remain in bed. He wanted to pass away the time, to get the taste of this conversation out of his mouth. That was why he went to another old friend, a clergyman, who was ignorant of physiology but learned about brasses. Waldo thought brasses might suit his mood, which was not a happy one.

When he came back he had left off hating Tom Shorter, but he was still uncertain as to rushing the girl into marrying him. He had forgotten the lawyers, her fortune, and its convenience to him; he was only thinking of the difference in their ages, and that she might meet a younger man, a better looking one. Not the musician, of course. But when he thought of him he had a twinge, very like jealousy, of which he was ashamed.

On his return from visiting the Rev. Richard Blakistone, he did not go straight home to his rooms in the "Albany," but dropped in to a house in St. James's Place, where an American journalist, who had insinuated himself so cleverly into London Society, that now he appeared to belong to it, dispensed cocktails and disseminated up-to-date gossip between six and eight o'clock. Waldo had an irrational desire to know what people were saying about him, or about the Wagners, or whether they were saying anything. The rooms in St. James's Place were a recognized rendezvous—open house where no ceremony need be observed—everybody went there. It was said that Parsons had an unequalled knowledge of the compounding of cocktails. Waldo knew very little of Jerry Parsons, and nothing but this in his favour. But he was in the humour for a cocktail, and he hoped to gather what people were saying; he

was too nervous to go home. There might be a letter from her to him there, contradicting or corroborating Lœtitia. Would she marry him in three weeks? He did not know, nor if he should persuade her to it.

He had a "Dry Martini" cunningly mixed and shaken, and certainly agreeable to the palate. He heard a great deal of gossip, was chaffed a little about ceasing to be a Benedict, and warned of restrictions in store for him. Many of his friends were present. It is possible, because his mood was curious, and his plans uncertain, and his glass constantly replenished, that he drank more than he knew.

Anyway, when Jerry Parsons, in his American accent, said:

"I saw your fiancée this morning, by the way, in Kensington Gardens. I don't know the man who was with her—long-haired fellow, probably a poet. No, it was not your cousin Gilbert, this was a much better-looking fellow," Waldo replied with sufficient lightness, and left without marked abruptness.

The valet, who was waiting in Lord Lyssons' bedroom, with the dress-clothes spread on the bed, various cans of hot water, and a bath in readiness, was unable to keep his evening appointment.

Lord Lyssons came in, walked up and down the sitting-room for ten minutes, and went out again without dressing, or saying anything. He was a most unsatisfactory gentleman to wait upon, and "very irregular in his 'abits!"

The motor was at the door of Stone House, the two acetylene lamps shining and casting deep shadows. For some inexplicable reason, although he had hurried to get there, Lord Lyssons did not at once ring the bell, but waited in the shadow. Now the door opened, and he could see inside the electrically-lit hall. The maid helped Lady Wagner into her lace and ermine opera cape; the man gave Sir Hubert his satin-lined coat, pulled it down at the back, adjusted it nicely. The butler was in waiting, flanked by two footmen.

At the gates, as the motor went through, a woman of the town stood, like a dishevelled Peri, envying Lœtitia's diamond tiara and the luxurious motor. Waldo heard the patrolling policeman say sharply to her:

"Now then, what are you doing here? You get along."

He came out of the shadows after that and went up to the still-open door. The butler, very respectful and dignified, explained that Sir Hubert and Lady Wagner had already left the house. They were dining with Lord and Lady Alistairs in Carlton House Terrace. . . .

"Is Miss Wagner better?"

"I believe so, milord."

"Is she at home?"

Miss Wagner was at home. The servants were obviously surprised that his lordship should linger, more surprised when he called to Lady Wagner's maid, who was just moving off after the completion of her arduous duties.

"Ask Miss Wagner if she can see me, will you? Tell her I won't keep her ten minutes." It was strange that his lordship knew no better.

"I will find Miss Wagner's maid," she said primly, disapprovingly. She was very like her mistress.

The butler and the two footmen, who knew his lordship had a lavish way with half-sovereigns, showed him into the morning-room on the ground floor.

"This way, milord. I'll see myself that the message gets conveyed." The butler was quite confidential, and duly rewarded.

The room, oak-panelled, and hung with mezzotints by J. R. Smith and William Ward, by Grozer and Dean, after pictures of women by Sir Joshua Reynolds, was Sir Hubert's own sanctum. There was a big writing-table, elaborately set out with blotter and huge inkstand, calendar and pen-rack; but there were no papers or sign of work. A big Chippendale bookcase, easy-chairs upholstered in green leather, and a large sofa, added something to the room's impressiveness.

"Can I bring you anything, milord?"

"Yes." The cocktails had made him thirsty. "Bring me a whisky and soda."

Manuella had spent a day in bed, then a day or two in her room, wondering if Waldo would call or write, show some interest in her health. She did not know that Dr. Shorter had advised her wedding should be postponed, although she knew that whatever he had said Sir William had contradicted. When Waldo neither came nor wrote she was something more than disappointed, her worst fears seemed confirmed.

On the third day of her seclusion she had the strangest possible letter from Harston Migotti, asking her to meet him, saying he had hung about the door hoping to see her, that he had something he must say to her. She did not answer the letter, because, before she had time to do so, she met him accidentally. It was the morning when Lord Lyssons came back to London. Her headache better, but not gone, tired of her room, wearied of her thoughts, not exactly unhappy, but restless, taking her maid with her, she went for a walk in the Park. She would have ridden, but walking was less trouble. It was warm and sunny, and her spirits revived directly she was outside the house. She had not an idea of meeting anyone, although it was true that Lord Lyssons was an early riser. She met the young musician before she had been walking ten minutes, and was glad. It saved her from answering his letter, and over and over again she had wanted to tell him how sorry and ashamed she had been of her stepmother's behaviour, and to assure him of her continued interest in his opera. She showed her pleasure in the encounter, perhaps too plainly, or perhaps he was misled by his own feelings and took hers for granted.

"May I walk a little with you?" he asked, after the preliminaries had been got through.

"Of course. I am going into Kensington Gardens. Isn't it a lovely morning? You'll tell me about the opera, won't you? I meant to write to you, but I've been ill."

He talked of the opera; the libretto was finished, also the overture, and many of the numbers. The maid behaved as discreetly as French maids are in the habit of doing. They were alone under the trees when he began by saying he hoped she had not been reproached upon his account the other day, and to tell her that the hour he spent with her had been the happiest in his life.

"It is the inspiration for which I have been waiting. I knew it then, or even before that. I know it better now."

To her intense surprise he burst out that he loved her, that he believed they were in sympathy, that she understood him.

"You will listen to my music, and I shall dedicate it to you; you will sing my songs." She was shocked and tried to stop him, agitated, and tried to reason with him, wanted to get up and run away. He poured out impassioned phrases.

"It is because it is new to you, you did not know I loved you; I did not know it myself. 'They never loved who loved not at first sight,' as your poet said. Of course it was that."

All she wanted was to get away, she did not know how to answer him. Although agitated and half frightened, she was very sorry for him, and anxious not to hurt his feelings. She was never so glad in her life as when the discreet French maid came forward and said it was time they went home, for it was nearing the lunch hour. She said incoherently that she was dreadfully sorry, and she was sure he could not mean it.

"I am afraid it is awfully late; we shall have to drive home even now. I can't stay. . . ."

"But I must see you again."

He understood her to say she was sure they would meet again. When they parted he had not an idea he had been rejected. It was natural she should be agitated. He was himself agitated, excited, exhilarated; this was quite different from the ordinary emotions. He had, of course, been in love before, but never like this, never in the least like this.

Manuella escaped from him with her maid. She was very sorry for him, and astonished he should be in love with her after having seen her only three times. When she had got over the amazement of it, and was once more in her own room, she was perhaps a little flattered. Supposing it had been Lord Lyssons who had said such things to her, such wonderful things! The supposition grew into daydreams that were like fairy tales, and lasted through lunch time and the afternoon.

"You are the light of my life, my inspiration; I do not love, I adore you." These were the things the strange young man had said to her under the trees.

Supposing Lord Lyssons had uttered them! Lord Lyssons being an Englishman, without that admixture of Italian blood and sentimental German training to which Harston Migotti owed his eloquence, was very unlikely ever to indulge in such rhapsodies. But, ignorant of ethnology, she had her happy dreaming.

And, because she was always highly imaginative and a creature of moods, it seemed like the continuation of her afternoon dreaming when Claire came up to her in the evening, just when she was preparing to go to bed and dream there, to say Lord Lyssons was below, and wished to speak with her. She had not seen him for three days, and now she heard he was here.

She ran down impulsively, never stopping to change her dress, or adjust her hair, just as if she had been sixteen instead of eighteen and without any of the advantages of Lœtitia's training. She was never quite such a child again after this evening; her fine impulsiveness and high courage were ingrained in her, but something of her ignorance fell away, of her fearless innocence.

She ran down when she heard Lord Lyssons was waiting in the library to see her, her luxuriant hair in a loose knot low on her neck. She actually wore that old school blouse, the red one in which he had first seen her. She had outgrown it and it was open at the throat, the slender girlish throat, on which the lovely head was set so superbly. Never had he seen her look more charm-

ing, more attractive. And his eyes were a little hot. He tried to collect himself:

"Hallo! that you?"

"Who did you think it was?"

"So you're better?"

"I'm quite all right."

"And the wedding need not be put off."

"Was it going to be?"

"You don't mean to say you didn't know Shorter ordered it off. Bellairs says there is nothing at all the matter with you. Are you glad or sorry there is to be no postponement?"

He had drunk whisky and soda on the top of the cocktails and it had loosened his tongue. She went pale, but her colour came back more quickly and overwhelmingly than it fled.

"That depends on what you are."

"Oh! does it? Am I glad or sorry? Let me think, I suppose I ought to have no doubt about it. . . ."

Never, never in any crisis of his life, could Waldo Lyssons find the appropriate word.

Manuella, standing when he first began to question her, now took the corner of the sofa. The red blouse, her dark hair, and pale face, against the green leather, made a picture Nicholson would have liked to paint.

He told her so, going over to where she sat, flinging himself into the opposite corner.

He thought he saw fear, fear of him, in her eyes, and that she shrank further into her corner.

"Of course you hate the idea of being married, you don't care a bit about me?"

He may have been mistaken in thinking she shrank from him; she was sitting quite still now. His long arm went out, and he drew her towards him. She may have been reluctant, or too surprised for resistance, but he drew her face to his own, and found her lips, her generous responsive lips. He sought her lips and found them. Now he forgot she was a child and remembered only that she was soon to be his wife. He held her

tightly, kissing her long and her heart went out to him as if it were water flowing. It seemed like that because she had no resentment of that long kiss; she yielded to it, and felt the warmth stealing through her. She wanted to hide her eyes, not her lips, from him. When at length he released her, she hid both lips and eyes on his shoulder, she was warmed all through and tingling. They sat like that a long time.

"We know now, don't we?" he whispered.

When he began to speak, his tongue halted, his words were lame; they were elliptical words and few, not in the least like Harston Migotti's fiery eloquence. But she would have understood, she would surely have understood, because she as surely responded. She never knew what he said, but that she answered, "I love you, I love you," feverishly in answer to something, she was sure; cruelly sure, as the event proved.

She had her head on his shoulder and her eyes hidden, and her words, although whispered, were loud in her ears:

"I love you."

What was happening? He put her away from him quickly, abruptly. He had risen and was no longer beside her on the sofa, her eyes were no longer hidden, and the vibration of her words was loud in the room. Discordant and harsh against it she heard her stepmother's voice, her stepmother's astonished voice:

"Manuella! Waldo! At this hour! on the sofa . . ."

Manuella gave a short, confused laugh:

"Well! this time, at least, it is not an itinerant musician."

"A vagrant peer," put in Lord Lyssons quickly.

"I must confess, I am surprised."

"Always been like that, from my cradle upward—before, I believe. Can't see a pretty girl without kissing her . . ."

A greater libel upon himself could not have been uttered, nor any sentence more incongruous with his mood. He wanted to cover his mood and hers, to protect her from Lœtitia's tongue. That secret he had surprised

was for themselves alone, the secret so exquisite and new. She would give herself to him! He could not think coherently, far less speak. He still felt her head on his shoulder, the warm young generous lips against his own.

"Rotten of me, isn't it? I am always doing things like that. I suppose I ought not to have come at all."

"It is a surprise to me, a most unpleasant surprise. Sir Hubert became suddenly unwell, we were compelled to return. Then, to find you here, Manuella alone with you . . . in *déshabillé!*"

"I agree, I thoroughly agree, the whole affair is most reprehensible."

"She was ordered complete rest, early hours. Sir William was most particular that she should keep her room."

He must stand between her and this woman's tongue, say anything to silence her:

"There is not the shadow of an excuse for me. I quite agree with you. But I heard she was out this morning. . . ."

"Out?"

"In Kensington Gardens, with that itinerant musician of hers." He had no longer the slightest fear of the young man, the slightest jealousy; her lips had told him all that he wished to know. "So I thought I had better come and see that he had not cut me out." The lightness of his speech was inconceivable.

"In Kensington Gardens, with—with that person! Manuella, surely this disgraceful story is not true? I understood you were keeping your room——"

"Disgraceful! Come now, come now, Lady Wagner. Why shouldn't she walk in the Park with him? If he were not itinerant, he wouldn't walk. You agree with me there, surely. Sit down; let us talk about the wedding. You wrote me it was not to be put off. Manuella here says she is glad of it. Shorter is an ass. I've been stopping away, thinking whether I ought not to take his advice, notwithstanding the great Bellairs. . . . And now

I hear she is just like you, would not have it put off for anything. . . ."

Manuella had hardly heard a word, until loud and clear as her own words in the room she heard these. She had been stunned to deafness by his others.

"I can't see a pretty girl without kissing her."

Was that what it meant, all it meant? And she had said: *"I love you"* to him. The flood of her heart that had gone out to him ebbed slowly, painfully back, icy cold, stopping her breath, submerging and stunning her.

"She is just like you, would not have it put off for anything."

She was being forced on him, and she had told him that she loved him. He could tell her stepmother, make light of it! She burned with shame, choked with shame.

She never heard what her stepmother had to say of her meeting with the musician, nor understood that her true lover was but trying to protect her, give her time to recover herself. She only wanted never to hear his voice again, never to hear him speak. Her hatred of her stepmother was as nothing compared with her hatred of him, as he stood there, and, as she imagined, made fun of what had happened between them, of that kiss, the flood of love that had carried her to him. What had been born in her with that long and tender kiss died, died in agony, not to be revived for many a long, misguided day.

"I don't want to marry you in three weeks, or at all. . . . I never said I wouldn't have it put off for anything." Her cheeks were scarlet, her eyes burning.

It was to Waldo she spoke, but Lœtitia could not understand about the morning walk and pursued the subject relentlessly.

"You are surely not going to permit her to continue her acquaintance with that person."

Waldo tried to divert her, and said that he did not suppose Manuella would be satisfied with his own companionship; jested, and said for his part he wasn't musical, couldn't grow his hair long; Manuella's taste was, of

course, strange. Then he mimicked Lœtitia's speech. "Live and let live. She must indulge her tastes, and I mine; you cannot put old heads upon young shoulders. . . ."

Manuella misunderstood everything. He had but meant to play lightning conductor, to bring the storm lightly and safely down upon himself, but it was a complete failure. Manuella, in the anguish of her reaction, said the most inconceivable things; that she hated Lord Lyssons and did not want to marry him at all, that she should meet Harston Migotti whenever she liked, that she knew he loved her, and was proud of it. . . .

The summer rain and lightning became winter sleet and ice. Lœtitia forgot the altered position, spoke to the girl in the old way. She said she was "not surprised"; she was coldly disgusted and acrimonious.

"It is of course Lord Lyssons' concern if he permits you to continue this extraordinary acquaintance."

Waldo laughed when Manuella said she hated him; that Harston Migotti was in love with her, and she proud of it. He knew she did not mean what she said, and although she had obviously lost her temper, he thought it was only with Lœtitia, and was not surprised.

He bantered her and said he was sorry he was so objectionable. Perhaps she would think it over and let him know in the morning if she was of the same opinion.

"I may look better in the morning. You 'never can tell,' as Bernard Shaw says. Wait and see; you may change your mind again. You were quite fond of me an hour or two ago; it may return."

Lœtitia would certainly not leave them alone again, it seemed there was only one thing to do, to get away.

He had his misgivings about leaving the girl with her; misgivings to be most fully realized, but he thought they had been too close for anyone to come between them now. For all his light talk and banter, that kiss had meant at least as much to him as to Manuella. The woman's talk about the musician was absurd, out of place; Manuella would know he took no heed of it. To-morrow he would

see her alone again, try to tell her something of what he felt for her, what her kiss had meant to him. But he thought she understood; she had already flushed to womanhood in his arms. He knew his were arms to hold her against herself, against the world; she needed understanding, sympathy—everything she had never had. And he would give all this to her, full measure, brimming over.

CHAPTER XI

LORD LYSSONS had not the least idea that it was he, and not her stepmother, who had hurt the girl —so hurt her that Lœtitia, although she said all the wrong things, not only that evening and the next morning, reiterating them, was only partly responsible for the result.

"Directly my back is turned you do something outrageous. Either I find you sitting with a strange young man, or together on the sofa like—like a cook and a policeman. No wonder Lord Lyssons thinks lightly of you. If it had not been for me, the wedding would have been put off, perhaps abandoned. I knew what was behind that letter from Dr. Shorter. He wanted it postponed—told the man what to say. I wonder how many people saw you walking in the Park with that person. I don't know where your sense is, your sense of shame. Was it not enough that you should have behaved so disgracefully to Lord Calingford, to the Duke of Banff? Let me tell you, we were astonished—yes, and very grateful, when Lord Lyssons came forward. It was not easy, don't imagine it was easy. Lady Sallust spoke to him and then to me. Your father promised he would do as much as he would have done for the Duke. You are the most ungrateful girl I think I have ever met, and I have had some experience with girls. You must have been mad when you talked as you did last night. Of

course, I can make allowances; you were startled when you knew Lord Lyssons heard of your escapade; I don't wonder at it. But he is a very honourable person, although eccentric and greatly in need of money. He will forgive you, I have no doubt he will forgive you, if you take back all you said; you ought to go down on your knees to him. . . ."

This was not all she said, not nearly all, but the rest was on the same note, hardening Manuella, although she only heard half of it. Manuella did not want Lord Lyssons to forgive her, she wanted to be able to hurt him. There were hours in the night when she could not bear that he should be in the world at all, when she wished he were dead. Because she had said "I love you" to him, and he had laughed! Perhaps it would hurt him to know he was not going to have her money. She would not marry him, not if there was not another man in the world, whereas there was any number of them, and one, Mr. Harston Migotti, had written her this morning to say that he adored her, asking her to run away with him.

When Lord Lyssons came, she could think of nothing but how to obliterate what she had told him. She went down to see him in the smaller drawing-room. He looked very tall and thin, and his expression was kind. She knew that, and that there was no one like him. She looked away from him because she knew it; the glass he was continually trying to keep in his eye, that he was replacing only this minute, could not disguise it. She tried to see his faults, to criticize him. He was not a dressy man, and if his valet did his hair he ought to have changed his valet. He had rowed when he was young, and his hands were oarsman's hands. It was impossible she had liked him to kiss her. She contrasted him with Harston Migotti, who had fallen in love with her at first sight, and now wished her to run away with him. She forced herself to remember his Beethoven brown and golden hair, his ardent eyes. She had such a pain in her heart when she turned away from Lord Lyssons and con-

trasted him with Harston Migotti that she could not speak. She was afraid to face him, she wished he would go away, and bewildered him by her manner.

"But what have I done? How have I altered? I thought last night at one time you were rather fond of me."

"Well, I wasn't; I was only pretending. . . ."

He couldn't understand it, suspected Lœtitia, wavered about what had occurred. He could not have dreamed it, and yet . . . yet! she said now that she hated him, and had only pretended. He went over and stood before her.

"Look at me."

"I don't want to look at you." She covered her face with her hands, a childish trick.

He took her hands down from her face, ignoring her efforts to thrust him away from her.

"Tell me the exact truth, the entire truth. I must hear it. Look at me!" But that she could not do. "Have they forced me upon you in the same way they tried to force Calingford? You don't like me at all, you dislike me? You asked Shorter to get our marriage postponed? Don't be frightened, tell me the truth; I only want to know the truth. Speak!"

Because those rough, strong oarsman's hands of his, and the way he held those struggling ones of hers, gave her that catch in her breath, that contraction of her heart, because she feared his breath, and that he might kiss her again, and again she might want to hide her face on his shoulder, because she was overwhelmed by her feeling, and did not know how long she could disguise it; she pushed him away with all her strength.

"I hate you, I hate you," she said. But "love" would have been the truer word.

He kissed her, notwithstanding that she said she hated him. His lips rested a moment on her hair—strange that she felt it in her heart.

"Poor kid! You haven't had a chance, have you? Not a five minutes' start." His voice was extraordinarily

low, and his manner had altered completely. Certainly he was taking her seriously now, but it was difficult for him to change his habit of speech.

"Think it over again. I'm afraid there's a devil of a time before you if you don't. We'll take Shorter's advice and postpone it. I'll go to Norway—anywhere—stay away until the end of the season. You can't mean to throw me over altogether."

She dared not look at him, and thought of nothing but how to tell him that what she said last night was not true; she did not love him, she hated him—hated him.

"I don't care where you go or what you do: I'm not going to marry you. I'd rather die."

"Why not walk?" He let go his hold of her when he said it; he hardly knew what he was saying.

It was impossible her feeling for him could have changed in so short a time. She would not have kissed him if she had not loved him; he knew that, and how straight she was, and impulsive. He almost stumbled upon the truth.

"Look here! it wasn't anything I said, was it? Not because I played the fool with Lady Wagner; trying to mislead her?"

"No!"

"You are sure?"

"I'm sure I want you to go away."

"You won't say anything more than that, you won't give me a chance?"

"I can't say more than that I hate the sight of you."

"But you didn't—" he persisted, "you didn't hate the sight of me last night."

That he reminded her again was the worst of all. She became furious, and showed him that ungovernable temper of which Lœtitia had felt it her duty to advise him. It did not repel him, he thought nothing at all of it. She might stamp her foot and flash her eyes and say hard things to him, but what he wanted to know was what was at the root of it. He was more, not less,

in love with her at the end of the interview, and not convinced, not really convinced, that she was telling him the truth when she said she hated him.

"You think you hate me. I don't believe you do a bit," were almost his last words, infuriating her. And as he turned and left the room slowly, he heard her say it was his conceit, his horrid vanity, that made him disbelieve it. When he had gone away he thought he heard her sobbing, and went back. But she had shut the door, and held it against him; he could not persist.

* * * * * *

All the hullabaloo there had been when she broke off her engagement with the Duke of Banff was doubled and redoubled when she dismissed Lord Lyssons in this summary fashion. Lord Lyssons did his best for her. As he told her, he knew Lœtitia would give her a devil of a time. He left the house after that abortive interview without attempting to see Lady Wagner. And after he had thought matters over as well as he was able for his pain, he wrote:

"Dear Lady Wagner,

"I have been thinking over that report of Sir William's. It must, of course, be a great satisfaction to you to have your judgment confirmed. But I have an idea nevertheless that Tom Shorter is the better man, that we had better stick to his advice. I'm sure a neat paragraph will occur to you. You could say, for instance, that I have gone to Heligoland with a camera. Your appreciation of the political situation will suggest an explanation of why the wedding is postponed until the end of the season. . . ."

What he wanted to bring out was that it was "postponed," not abandoned; he wanted that reassurance for himself. To Lady Sallust he wrote also:

"Best of Aunts,

"Have you ever heard of the 'Kinchin Lay'? I'm sure you have not; it's East End slang, not Lime-

house oratory. I can't play the part I undertook, I've torn up the copy. Somerset House must do its worst. Gilbert may have to leave off writing poetry and take to mathematics, but tell him not to hurry; he can pursue the high-sounding hexameter until he hears again. Be kind to the girl if you get a chance."

Lady Sallust did not understand the letter at all until she had seen Lœtitia, and then she understood it less than before.

The condition of Lœtitia's mind is not difficult to comprehend. Here was the girl on her hands again, and probably a horrible scandal connected with her. Everybody knew or said that the Duke of Banff had thrown her over; now Lord Lyssons was leaving England on the eve of his marriage. It was entirely characteristic that Lœtitia should attribute this last to the discovery of an intrigue between the girl and that "mountebank," and express it coarsely. There are few things as coarse as the woman who talks about her "refinement." Manuella had hardly given a serious thought to Harston Migotti until her stepmother accused her of an intrigue with him. Afterwards . . . but it were better that events should appear in their sequence.

When Lady Wagner received Lord Lyssons' letter and realized the contumacy with which the girl had received her advice, she became Lœtitia Briarley with a refractory pupil, the stepmother who had not hesitated to use a cane, solitary confinement, bread and water, in early efforts to subdue "one of the worst children she had ever known!" She *was* one of the worst children, and she had grown up into one of the worst girls. Lady Wagner told her so now, and in unmistakable language. She did not condescend to argue, she threatened. She said this "disgraceful and indecent conduct" could not be permitted, she was not "going to be allowed to disgrace them all, she had gone too far. . . ."

Manuella did not even defy her at first, maintaining a contemptuous silence. When Lœtitia spoke of Harston

Migotti and said inconceivable things about their relations, the girl did not even understand what was being implied. That her stepmother abused him, called him a mountebank or an adventurer, made her hot in his defence, but hardly in words: she would not condescend to defend him.

Being Lœtitia, and with that "position to keep up" to which she was never tired of alluding, the most necessary thing first to be done was to put a face upon the matter for the public. Sir Hubert had been taken ill at Lady Alistairs' dinner; the paragraph disseminated by the Press Association was reasonable under the circumstances:

"On account of the serious illness of Sir Hubert Wagner the marriage between Miss Wagner and the Earl of Lyssons is unavoidably postponed."

Sir Hubert did not in the least mind going into retreat; there were half a dozen cures and diets he had not yet tried—Vibro-massage, for instance, and St. Ivel milk.

The next announcement was that:

"In consequence of the continued indisposition of Sir Hubert Wagner he is compelled to cancel all engagements."

Stone House was to be shut up, the family removing to Scotland, to Sir Hubert's place at Gairoch, known for the salubrity of the climate.

This was in the middle of the season, their first season at Stone House! It was a cruel sacrifice for Lœtitia to make, and Manuella was not spared the narrative of it.

To have actively ill-treated the girl, chastised or starved her, would have been at this time entirely to Lœtitia's mind. But we live in a complicated world, and such primitive action was impossible with a girl of nearly eighteen. To say that, before the removal to Gairoch, and during the journey, she nagged her continually, in season and out, is to put the case very mildly. Lady Wagner lost no opportunity of pointing out that

Manuella had disgraced her family, that on her account they would be socially ostracised. Manuella's reasoning powers were almost deadened by the repeated blows from Lœtitia's flail-like phraseology. That must be counted as an excuse for her. When she dashed off a foolish letter to Migotti, just before they started, she had no definite intention. He had seen the announcement of the postponed wedding, drawn his own conclusion, and written her eloquently and passionately. She replied that her people were awfully angry with her and were carrying her off to Scotland. She added the address, and that she would like to hear how he was getting on with the opera. It was her protest against Lœtitia's abuse of him. Nothing more. Although, perhaps, when she was hearing constantly how entirely evil she was, and outside the pale, it was a solace to read in his impassioned letter that she was adorable and beautiful, and that he was laying, not only himself, but his art at her feet.

Arrived at Gairoch, there was a short lull in hostilities. Sir Hubert's nerves could not withstand the paragraphs, and he developed in earnest the illness that had been prematurely announced. The attention of the house became concentrated upon him, and Manuella was left to herself. Even those few days were sufficient to justify Dr. Shorter. Porridge and cream, plain food and open air brought back the colour to the girl's cheeks, strengthening her for what was in front.

Lœtitia heard from Lady Sallust. Nominally she wrote to inquire after Sir Hubert, really to tell of a letter from Waldo, in Norway, in which he asked to be kept informed of Sir Hubert's progress. Lady Sallust had cut out the extract and enclosed it:

"I hope I am not considered a recalcitrant lover, because I could not resist the salmon. Have you by any chance seen my fiancée? Keep me posted in Wagner news. I expect to be back before the autumn."

Lady Sallust added her comment:

"I don't understand this, but I am sure you will.

What about a quiet wedding in Scotland? Waldo is always incomprehensible. I'm not clear now *why* he went away. Was there any quarrel? I will write him anything you tell me. . . ."

Albert arrived during the lull, very curious, quite prepared to be sympathetic to his sister or his stepmother, full of his own affairs. Lœtitia gave him her own version; by this time she was quite persuaded it was the true one.

"He discovered she was keeping up a correspondence, secretly meeting a foreign musician. . . ."

"A musician!" Even Albert was shocked that she should have so far forgotten herself.

"You may be able to influence her. If she could be brought into a proper state of mind it seems Lord Lyssons is prepared to come forward again. His affairs are in a shocking state. But, of course, it is one of the oldest earldoms. I have my hands full just now; so much correspondence, your father's illness; everything devolves upon me. And in the height of the season, too! Perhaps you will succeed in bringing her to a sense of her conduct. When you have spoken to her and made it clear, you can tell her that I have heard from Lady Sallust, that I am myself writing to Lord Lyssons, and am conveying her regrets, her contrition. She must, of course, promise not to see or correspond with this dreadful person, to break off all intercourse with him. . . ."

Albert did his best in conveying this conversation to his sister; but he was not a persuasive person.

"I say, you know, this is simply tommy-rot." He liked the expression and repeated it. "Tommy-rot, I call it! Who is the bounder, anyway? You can't marry a musician—a chap with a name like a penny-ice-cream man."

"Who said I was going to marry him?"

"Well, you'll have to chuck it in the end; why don't you do it now, and let me tell her it's all settled? She'll

get Lord Lyssons back, his affairs are in no end of a mess. . . . This other fellow, now, he isn't even a gentleman. It isn't worth the row. She is in the devil's own rage. She says you are mad, she will get you locked up, she's capable of it, you know. Sir William Bellairs will say anything he is told. . . ."

"So will you, it seems. I don't care what she says, or does. I'm not a child any more. I never heard people talk like you all do about musicians. Harston Migotti is a genius. . . ."

"Genius be damned! I suppose you mean he's got long hair!"

She did not want to quarrel with Albert, nor he with her, and she did not care in the least about Harston Migotti, although she defended him. She received almost daily letters from him; he had an idea now that she was being persecuted for his sake; he wrote wonderful love-letters. It was really only in defiance of Lœtitia that she encouraged and answered them.

"You are not going to make an absolute ass of yourself? You are not going to throw this bombshell, this organ-grinder, at us?"

"I'm going to do whatever I choose."

With reluctant admiration he said she'd got any amount of pluck:

"You don't mean a word of it, you know. But you always did like fighting her."

"And always shall."

He was in no hurry to go to Lœtitia with the story of Manuella's defiance. He lounged about the grounds with his sister and went on talking; although he had nothing more illuminating to say than that it was "rot," or "bally rot," or "tommy-rot"; that she would have to "climb down," so "why not do it at once?" and other similar futilities. All through her childhood she had known Albert admired her when she fought Lœtitia, although he never followed her example. Lœtitia slapped her often in those days, hard vindictive slaps, and one day she had bitten Lœtitia's hand. The solitary confine-

ment that followed was easy to bear, because Lœtitia's hand bled when she bit it, and Albert had been awed at her daring.

"You've always had pluck; I wish I had."

Now the admiration came reluctantly, and was followed by a long tale of his own troubles and difficulties. They were utterly sordid, but he seemed to like talking about them. He said he had once been in love himself, when he was sixteen, with a "boys' maid," as they were called—a servant in his house at Eton. In exasperation she interrupted to say she had never been in love, she wasn't in love, didn't know what he meant. Then she grew scarlet, and so made him exclaim:

"What's the good of denying it? Girls can't help falling in love; it's a way they have. Why should you be different?"

He maundered about chorus-girls, barmaids, girls in tobacconists' shops. She shut her ears against the sordid talk he poured into them. It was only when he said again that Lœtitia was going to write to Lord Lyssons that she became excited.

"She is not to write to him. I won't have it; I forbid it. I swear I'll run away with Harston Migotti if she does. He shan't think I've sent for him."

"Tell her so yourself, then. *I* shan't; I've got to keep on good terms with her—got to, I tell you!"

She did not stop to think, for it was not her way. They would make him believe she wanted him, whether he cared for her or not; that she was like the girls of whom Albert spoke, who had no dignity.

She made a flying run to her stepmother's room, and broke in upon her without ceremony.

"Albert says you are going to write to Lord Lyssons." Her face was flushed, her eyes full of tears and battle.

"To what am I indebted for the honour of this visit?" Lady Wagner rose when her stepdaughter came into the room. Her tones were icy. She thought she was dignified, and justified in resenting the intrusion on her solitude by this disgraced and disgraceful girl. Manuella

looked beautiful in this mood, but naturally Lady Wagner set no value on her beauty. She only saw the old obstinacy and evil temper.

"Are you going to write to him?"

"Would you kindly allow me at least the privilege of solitude? Your behaviour becomes worse and worse. As I was telling your brother, it may become necessary to consult Sir William Bellairs. . . . Will you go?"

"Not until you've answered me."

"I am certainly thanking Lord Lyssons for his extraordinary delicacy, his consideration."

"Asking him to come back?"

"I will not be cross-questioned. I don't know what things are coming to."

"Don't you? Well, you can. They're coming to this: if you write to Lord Lyssons I'll run away with Harston Migotti. I swear I will. I won't be thrust on Lord Lyssons. He doesn't care about me. . . ." She was beside herself. Scarlet in the face.

"Who could?" Lœtitia answered coldly. "Not that that has anything to do with it; he probably found you exceedingly forward. Care about you! One would think you were a housemaid!"

Of course, the words had escaped Manuella unwittingly; she would have done anything to recall them. Perhaps her stepmother would put that in her letter, that she complained he did not care for her!

"I swear I'll run away with Harston Migotti if you write."

"I am not to be moved by threats. You are interrupting my morning's work. I wish you to understand that until you recollect yourself, and your duty to me and your father, until you leave off talking and thinking of this disgusting person, I wish for no intercourse with you; no intercourse to which I am not compelled. You will probably find he, too, will not wish to be burdened with you if your father cuts you off with a shilling, as he will do, as he will certainly do, if you don't alter your ways. Go away!"

Manuella did not go. She stormed and raged, and even begged her stepmother not to write to Lord Lyssons. Her life seemed to hang on it.

Lœtitia remained calm. She kept her pen in her hand, her eyes on the paper before her, dipping it in the ink now and then, holding it suspended. "How much longer," she seemed to say, "how much longer are you going to stand there, saying those unlady-like things, keeping me from my correspondence? I have no more to say to you."

Manuella flung herself out of the room in the end, half maddened by this exasperating and contemptuous calm, banging the door behind her, confirming Lœtitia's worst opinion of her manners.

Albert met her outside.

"Didn't get any good out of her, I suppose?"

She could not even speak to him.

In the evening, ostentatiously placed upon the hall-table, ready for the post, in such a position that it was impossible to miss it, was a letter in Lœtitia's precise and pointed hand-writing, addressed to the "Right Honourable the Earl of Lyssons."

At dinner Lœtitia said she hoped Manuella had recovered herself.

* * * * * *

At five o'clock the next morning, after a night of unreasoning rage, Manuella went from Gairoch, leaving girlhood behind her, and so much more, rushing into the unknown. It was the mood in which children commit suicide; one reads of such cases. She could not breathe under the same roof as her stepmother.

Claire packed her box, Barker took it to the station. Never would she forget the journey, nor recall it without the same shuddering sense of unreality and terror. She had told them that if Lord Lyssons was written to she would run away with Harston Migotti, and she was going to keep her word.

She drove to the station at five o'clock in the morning. The two servants helped her, the others may have known

how to look the other way. Lœtitia was not popular in the servants' hall, and her treatment of the girl was commented upon freely.

In the crawling local trains, changing from one to another, dodging the pursuit that never came, she had alternations of feeling, hot fits, cold apprehensions. Her courage and her cowardice raced together in her heart-beats. At every change she looked for a familiar face, for the one who might have been sent to bring her back. It was two days after she left Gairoch before she reached London.

At home, at Gairoch, she was not missed until the morning was far advanced. Everyone in the house knew, save Lady Wagner and Sir Hubert. Her own maid told Lœtitia in the end—her own maid, who was not without gratification at being able to convey bad news, who did her duty with gusto.

"Miss Wagner is not in her room, milady; her bed has not been slept in. They are saying in the house as she has run away. I thought your ladyship ought to know."

Lœtitia, without her transformation, showing more skull than even Dr. Shorter had seen, changed colour, and the pink in her nose deepened. For a wild moment she thought the girl had committed suicide. If that were so, an explanation of everything would be easy to find: "*Suicide whilst of unsound mind.*" But the voice of her maid went on:

"She must have gone by the early morning train to Pitlochrie. Nobody in the house knew nothing about it, but her box has gone. Mary says. . . ."

But Lady Wagner did not wish to hear what the housemaid had said. When she collected her thoughts she became haughty and imperious, commanding that she was to be dressed quickly.

"No one is to go to Sir Hubert with this news. Tell the household so. I shall inform him myself. . . ."

To disbelieve the story, or even question it, was impossible. It was just what the girl would have done.

She had "no shame, no feeling." So said Lœtitia as she hurried through her toilette, making up her mind meanwhile—her inexorable mind. "Miss Mincey-Pincey," the Dutch children had called her in her governess days. The name suited her this morning before the transformation was adjusted. Her lips were one narrow and bloodless line, she was as prim and stiff as if she had never captured the mining magnate, nor achieved the dignity of a married woman. All virginity was outraged. Manuella had run away with her lover! She was an "abandoned girl whose name must not be mentioned in the house." She came to this conclusion quickly, without consulting Sir Hubert or waiting to hear her bad opinion confirmed; and she voiced it before she left the bedroom.

"We shall wash our hands of her entirely. I have done all I could to save her. . . ." She was not in the habit of talking to her maid, but the occasion was exceptional. "You will say that I do not wish the matter discussed."

She might have had some difficulty with Sir Hubert. He did, indeed, make a protest, but Lœtitia was so anxious he should not agitate himself, so concerned as to the effect excitement might have upon him, that he imagined she knew something about his health which he did not know himself, that Sir William had told her, warned her. He insisted upon hearing what Sir William had said.

"Did he tell you there was any tendency to apoplexy? I have had anything but a good night. These spots before my eyes are only a sign of biliousness. It is absurd to talk of washing our hands of her, of letting her go. She must be found; we must see what is to be done for them. Of course, I can't go up to London myself in this state. Albert must go. Did Sir William say anything about me that you are keeping back? Do these spots mean anything? My hands are a little shaky. I am not going to have a stroke, am I? This news has shaken me. You don't recollect her mother? Of course you don't recollect her mother; what am I saying? I think you had better telegraph for Sir William."

" Sir William said you must be kept very quiet; there is a tendency for the blood to rush to the head."

Lœtitia used every weapon in her arsenal, tried deliberately to frighten him, took everything out of his hands. By the end of the day he was nearly as ill as he thought himself. Sir William charged two hundred guineas for the journey to Scotland, but what was money when Sir Hubert Wagner's eyes did not focus, when he felt a loss of power in one hand, and began to speak incoherently? Lady Wagner had some excuse for her decision that Manuella was not to be pursued. She had chosen to leave them; her conduct had " flung her father on a bed of sickness "; they would " erase her name from the archives of the family "; Albert should be their " only child."

Lœtitia never invented a phrase nor forgot one, and this was a juncture to which they all came appropriately.

It was comparatively easy to act as she desired. Fear or excitement, treatment, or his sixty-fifth year, were responsible for a slight stroke. Even Sir William Bellairs was able to diagnose it. Many days afterwards, before that little rupture in the brain was fully healed, Lœtitia showed him an announcement of the marriage in a registry office of " Manuella Wagner and Harston Migotti."

" And she has never even written, she has made no inquiry, although the papers have been full of your illness. I have heard from everybody; we have been inundated with telegrams, and most kind inquiries. But your daughter has ignored you entirely. . . . "

It may have been true, Manuella may not have written. Lœtitia can have the benefit of the doubt. Sir Hubert, in his weakness, fell to whimpering, and said Lœtitia was right; she was an ungrateful daughter.

From this time onwards, under fostering, what had been hypochondria became something very like monomania. Sir Hubert was really in no condition to resist his wife, nor defend his daughter; he could think of nothing but his health.

CHAPTER XII

MANUELLA arrived at Euston two days after she had left Gairoch, her passion and herself exhausted, nothing but her obstinacy strong. She had telegraphed to Harston Migotti to meet her. He had asked her to come to him, and rather than Lord Lyssons should know she cared for him, she was here.

She looked for him, putting her head out of the windows, straining her eyes, even before the train came to a standstill in the station. Then she got out and looked up and down the platform. He was not there.

"Any luggage, miss?" She was irresolute. The porter found her box, shouldered it, and waited for direction.

"I'd better have a cab." The telegram might have miscarried; she had given it to a little paper boy only a few hours ago.

"Where to? Where shall I tell him to drive? Thank you, miss." She tipped him, then hesitated an imperceptible moment.

"Tell him to drive to the nearest hotel."

"'Temperance'?"

There were several temperance hotels in the neighbourhood, and they seemed to the man, grey-haired, and with a family of his own, more suitable to her youth than the "Euston." She was travel-stained and not well dressed and he gave her the best advice he knew.

"Yes. No. Anywhere!" she answered.

"I should try 'Leeson's,'" he said; "it's a very respectable house, miss," he said confidentially.

"Lookin' for a situation," was his summary of the position, "new to London."

When the cab pulled up at the sordid house and she got out, her heart sank, her tired eyes filled with tears. She was ashamed of herself when she felt those tears in her eyes, and recognized the cause. "Leeson's" was so unlike Stone House, or Gairoch. But her whole life was going to be unlike the life she had led lately; she had known that all along. Nevertheless, the outside impression of this third-class temperance hotel, or boarding-house, made her heart sink. The cabman lumbered rheumatically off his seat to help with her box. She rang, and a German waiter, young, not over clean, answered the bell.

"Can I have a room? Have you got rooms?"

"I will call Mr. Leeson."

She did not hear the name, she was nervous, anxious that no one should see it, pretending self-possession. She overpaid the cabman, following her box and the German waiter into the hall that smelt of mutton or candle-grease, or many lodgers. She sat on a wooden chair in the hall whilst the proprietor was being fetched. The desire to cry had left her; she was entirely occupied in keeping up the appearance of self-possession, as if all that was happening was nothing new to her. She need not have troubled. Mr. Leeson was represented by his wife, a civil woman, with rheumy eyes, who was entirely commonplace, except for her tenses. These were grotesque, and misrepresented her mind.

"Would you be wanting a sitting-room as well as a bedroom? And what were you thinking of paying?"

Manuella had not the slightest idea, but answered vaguely:

"Are they good rooms?"

"Perhaps you would like to see them?"

"Yes, please." The rheumy-eyed woman turned a

bent back, covered by a brown blouse irregularly hooked up, showing gaps, and led the way upstairs.

She opened the door of a front room, where there were walnut-wood chairs and sideboard, saddlebag sofa, and the same smell that dominated the hall.

"The bedroom is behind; there'll be a double bed in it. How long would you be wanting it for?" Mrs. Leeson was only mildly interrogative. Manuella covered her inability to reply by asking what was the price.

"They would be two guineas and a half a week. We could not do it for less than that, and a shilling a day for the kitchen fire. Washing will be extra. How long did you say it would be for?"

Manuella agreed to the terms; she had not the least idea whether they were dear or cheap.

"I'll take them," she said indecisively. The woman looked at her for the first time with something approaching personal interest. This strange young person had not tried to make the bargain which had been allowed for in the quotation and was customary. She had not looked into the bedroom nor asked any questions.

"Then you'd like your box brought up. Fritz will uncord it for you." In this locality boxes were corded, not strapped. "The dining-room is downstairs; dinner is at one. Can I get you anything before I go?"

"Can't I have my dinner sent upstairs?"

"Oh, yes. But it's extra—sixpence extra for meals served in the rooms. I'll tell Fritz to bring you up the tariff; it's all wrote down."

Slowly Mrs. Leeson woke up to the fact of there being something unusual about her new lodger; she began to be suspicious, not that it was "any affair of hers." Nothing was very definitely any affair of hers except making a living profit in a house where there was no drink served, an almost hopeless task.

"We shut up the house at eleven o'clock. If you are out after that me or my husband sits up, but . . ."

"Oh, I shan't be out," she answered hastily.

Mrs. Leeson withdrew.

"I don't know what to make of her," she said to her husband later; "she seems respectable. It's a big box she has with her; Fritz could hardly get it up the stairs."

"Did you ask her to pay in advance?"

"She is not that sort. Looks more like a runaway to me, as if she's run away from school. She says she wants us to send off a letter as soon as she has written it. That'll be to a young man, I'm thinking. It's not our affair."

"Not so long as she pays her way," Mr. Leeson agreed, taking his long churchwarden out of his mouth and preparing to argue. Argument was his principal contribution to the work of the house.

"Her dinner is to be sent up to her room."

"Then I'll step up with it myself. There's no knowing." The last sentence was cryptogrammatic, and intentionally controversial. But Mrs. Leeson kept her mouth aggravatingly shut, looked at the mutton roasting in the oven, and shut the iron door with a bang.

Mr. Leeson's curiosity made him as good as his word. By the time he brought up the dinner Manuella had removed her hat and her travel-stained clothes, washed in cold water with yellow soap, taken down her hair, brushed and put it up again, and changed into a white embroidered dress that was one of the triumphs of Lucille's *atelier*, a trousseau dress.

"She looks like a young lady, that's what she looks like, and a rare and 'ansome one," was Mr. Leeson's report, when he had finished laying the cloth, adjusting the dingy cutlery, putting two straw mats on the table to prevent the hot dishes leaving a mark, and gone downstairs to fetch the "cut from the joint and the two veges!"

He was a long time returning, and while she was waiting Manuella wrote a letter. She was sure now the telegram had miscarried. At first she thought she would send a cab with the note, then that it would be better posted. The nearer the time came when she would see him the more she dreaded the meeting. It was absurd, because why had she come here? Why had she run away,

but to join him? It was absurd, but it was true. She was filled with fears, misgivings, a suddenly reared and hydra-headed modesty. She had to send for him, but she did not want him to come. Inside she was cold, trembling, frightened at what she was about to do. Outwardly she kept her self-control.

"Have this letter posted at once, please; it is very important," she said, when Mr. Leeson reappeared, perspiring, but prepared to be friendly.

"I'm passing that way this afternoon, miss, I'll drop it for you. You'll be in an 'urry for the answer."

Having said it was important, she would not tell him there was no hurry. She bolted her dinner, for there was no saying how soon Harston Migotti would be here. She had only written that she was here in London. He was a stranger to her, little more than a stranger. There was no beginning and no end to her letter; she did not know what to call him, or how to sign herself. She knew nothing intimately about him.

He was not surprised to get her letter, not nearly as surprised as she was to have written it. He came as quickly as possible from his rooms in Bedford Square.

Manuella had a first overwhelming moment of terror when he came in. What had she done? Had he meant it when he implored her to come? Was it true he was really in love with her? But the thought was only momentary. His personality was so overwhelming that there was not room for hers.

"But here you are! How wonderful it is! I have not been able to work, to play, or to compose!" She did not respond to his embraces, shrinking from them rather; she could not understand that all this was happening to her. He soothed what he imagined to be her fears.

"We will be married as quickly as possible. I have a friend, quite a great friend, and he will tell us how it is to be done. Oh! how I long that you are my wife! I scarcely believed you would come. And yet, ever since I had your letter, your first dear letter, that I kissed and

kissed again, I have felt more than happy. . . . I have known that you loved me. . . ."

She tried to believe it was true, and that that was why she had come; he was really a genius, and of course he loved her, he was telling her so all the time. She could see nothing beyond the immediate present, desperately refusing to look.

An amazing few days followed. Harston was with her all the time, embracing her, playing to her on the dreadful cottage piano, out of date and out of tune, talking to her about himself, about his opera, about Madame Liebius, whom he actually brought to see her, and about Gerald Streatfield, who was his best friend, his good English friend, who would arrange that they should marry as soon as the law—the strange English law—allowed.

Madame Liebius, who was the kindest-hearted soul in the world, was kinder than possible to Manuella.

"And you have come all the way from Scotland to marry our Migotti, our wonder boy. I never thought that he would have fallen in love like this. Oh! but you are lovely, my child. And he tells me that you can sing, and that your father is that Sir Hubert Wagner, at whose great house I sang and he played the Trio! Of course I remember now—you came in the artists' room. You have run away to marry Migotti. *Wunderschön!* Ah! but he will make a great name. Have you heard his symphony? What am I to do for you both? Will you leave this so strange house?" She looked around her with obvious distaste. "Will you come back to my hotel with me? Of course I shall go with you to the church, or to the Office, if you are not married in a church. I have known Harston since he was a baby; since he played when he could not reach the piano, but sat upon my lap to touch the keys. At Kreuznach they called him the infant Mozart. You will be proud to have such a husband, will you not? But you are brave, very brave to run away from your home. I love romance. I myself am romantic. . . ."

All the days were incredible, impossible. Always

Manuella thought that she would wake up and find none of it was true, that she was back in Stone House, or at Gairoch; that Lord Lyssons would come in, tease her, tell her he had come to fetch her. She dreamed of him every night, although Harston Migotti was with her every day, and she was going to marry him in less than a week!

The Leesons knew everything now and that it was a runaway marriage. Romance and sentiment are the two great dominating factors of English life, without which the lower orders would all be Socialists, and unrest grow quickly to revolution. Now the overworked chambermaid, the workhouse boy who did the duties of hall-porter, the proprietor who had never been solvent since he came into business, and his wife who agreed it was "all the fault of them moneyed men who made the laws," knew that what they had dreamed of all their lives was in their midst. The two young people had good service, no one forgot to knock at the door before entering, willing feet ran to their call; they created and diffused their own light and heat, and the whole dingy house was warmed and illuminated.

It was managed very quickly. Before she realized the moment had come Harston called for her, and there, waiting in the Registry Office, were Madame Liebius and Gerald Streatfield, and a man behind a big desk, who looked like a superannuated clerk. The short ceremony seemed to be all over before it began. She was Harston Migotti's wife; she was actually married, a thick gold wedding-ring was on her finger!

The day before Gerald Streatfield had talked enthusiastically of Harston.

"I never thought of such a thing as marriage for him. Such men as he generally live alone; they must live alone, you know. Half the time they are not there at all, not where we are, I mean. But you understand, of course you understand him. I was all against his marriage at first; but when I saw you, I said: 'She knows, she understands him.' I saw you were not in love with him, not in the ordinary way, like a sentimental schoolgirl.

But your eyes watch him, your beautiful sombre eyes; it is not your own happiness you are thinking of. I can see that. He wants you, needs you . . . in some things he is the merest boy, he has the heart of a child and the mind of a superman. He tells me you have a wonderful voice. I hope you do not intend to sing in public. Of course, if he wishes it, if it is his music, but really to marry Harston Migotti is a profession, a vocation in itself. One has to watch constantly, and understand, and fall in with all his moods. . . ."

After the colourless strange words that made them man and wife, there was the lunch that Madame Liebius gave in the restaurant of the "Ritz," where everybody stared at Madame Liebius or at Harston, where Manuella's plate was heaped and heaped again with things she did not eat; when she drank champagne and saw faces that she knew, surprised incredulous faces from that Stone House world, recognizing and not recognizing her, melting away and leaving only Harston Migotti, to whom she was married, who was entirely strange to her.

She drove in Madame Liebius's brougham to Paddington. Madame Liebius kissed her many times, perhaps too warmly. Madame Liebius had the ample proportions of a contralto, and had lunched generously.

"Oh! but you will take care of him, you will not let him ever be sorry. You are a dear, dear girl, and I love you very much. It is an experiment, for he will never be like other men. But everything is well—it is very well, of course. You will care for him, he takes no care of himself, of the times for his meals. . . ." She kissed and praised her because she would look after Harston Migotti's meals and clothes, and lighten the long hours that he worked.

At Paddington Gerald and Harston were waiting for them. They had gone on earlier in a motor-cab, reserved a carriage, and registered the luggage. Harston was beaming; he held his hat in his hand, his thick crisp hair, yellow and longer than is customary with most Englishmen, was uncovered during the whole time he stood on

the platform. Many people turned to look at him. It was a noble head, an interesting face. His friends saw him with a halo, but even without it the massive features and fine brow made him sufficiently remarkable. They talked of him, as if she were of no moment, a subsidiary, of little personal account, something he suddenly needed, and that they were glad he would have. She wondered if he, too, was thinking that. He smiled radiantly when he saw her.

"Isn't she lovely?" he asked Gerald and Madame Liebius. He would have asked it of the bystanders if they would have listened to him. Then he kissed her cheek, both cheeks, before everybody! He kissed Gerald, too, in the same way before he got into the reserved carriage; this rather shocked her although she was so numbed and strange. That Madame Liebius should kiss him was more natural.

"Oh! you boy, you dear, dear boy. . . ." Madame Liebius was almost crying. As for Gerald, he may have coloured when Migotti kissed him, but all he said was:

"This will make history, you know."

"You will come and see us on Sunday, you will both of you come down?" Harston called to them out of the window as the train moved off. Madame Liebius was wiping away her tears, Gerald waving his hat to them. It was understood they would come. The bridal pair were only going to Wargrave, Wargrave-on-Thames. Gerald had arranged their honeymoon.

The guard blew his whistle, waved his green flag. . . .

Now they were alone, man and wife; little more than boy and girl, but man and wife nevertheless, although when Manuella looked at her husband she saw a stranger.

CHAPTER XIII

THE George Inn at Wargrave, where the honeymoon was to be spent, is a long, two-storied house, built at the worst period of early Victorian architecture, and redecorated when it had deteriorated further. The bedrooms are low, but without compensating width. There are no bathrooms, nor is hot water handy, while the sanitary arrangements are primitive; candles gutter in pewter candlesticks on a table at the top of the stairs. The new wall-papers are hideously yellow, or unwholesomely terra-cotta, with huge unnatural flowers for design. There are compensations, however. The broad river sweeps by the bedroom windows; every day save Sunday there is peace in the garden that slopes to it, charm in the rafts to which the boats are moored. On Sundays men and maidens in boating costumes sit with their tea or their beer, and rest awhile from pulling their boats up the river or down the river. These young men and maidens have the lust of movement. If they are at Wargrave they must go to Henley, or even to Sonning; it is not enough for them to drift into the backwater, tie up their boats and be still. They want to take off their coats, roll up their sleeves, row, and get into a perspiration to show their prowess. Wargrave is a favourite haunt, and the "George" overcrowded for week-ends in July and August, even in September.

And the inn, badly built, badly furnished though it

may be, is admirably administered. There are no dirty German waiters, but trim clean English maids, with the spirit of alacrity in serving; the substantial English fare is of the best quality, abundant and well cooked. It was a good place in which to spend a honeymoon. Harston Migotti and Manuella had it almost to themselves; the flowing river, the quiet backwater, the warm and mellow autumn. In the backwater the sun shone through the shifting leaves of the willows, the water plashed against the boat, now a water-rat made a quick irregular course from bank to bank; a wagtail showed its sudden black and white against the green; a blackbird or a linnet peeped upon them. But for the most part they saw nothing but Harston Migotti. Both of them saw the same; that was perhaps inevitable.

Manuella knew, before she had been married many hours, that she had committed a crime in marrying him, wronging him hardly less than herself. If she had not known it before, she knew it when Waldo's letter came to her, the answer to Lœtitia's, forwarded by some friendly or unfriendly hand from Gairoch. Waldo wrote better than he spoke, he did not halt with his pen. She could even read between the lines, for those few days of her marriage had sharpened all her faculties, showing her her irretrievable folly. Waldo's letter told her everything she wanted to know, but had not waited to hear. He did love her. Whether he laughed or bantered, went away or stayed, mattered nothing. He made it clear that he loved her, had only tried to do what was best for her.

"I know I can take care of you if you will trust yourself to me. I want you to be happy, to be again the girl I met in the boat. I'll take you to Rhodesia, anywhere you want to go. I think I understand you now better than I did when I was in London. I love your passion and your pride. Child that you are, you must not be proud with me. You gave me your lips! Oh! my dear generous one! That was the moment of my life. Wait for me, think of me, get over your pride, or keep and let

me share it. Now that I am away from you, I know you care for me, and I'll make you glad of it even if then you were a little ashamed. Sweetheart, I'm a duffer at talking, there has never been anyone to whom I could talk, so I've played Tom Fool and stood outside. You know where you are with me, don't you? In my heart of hearts, and no one has ever been there before you. I wish I were younger, handsomer, more like that musician of yours; but, as I am, I believe you care about me. It is very wonderful, and I ought perhaps not to believe it. But you kissed me, you let me kiss you, and you are my Manuella, beautifully impulsive, natural, honest. Girlie, when may I come back, when will that pride melt again 'as once in June'? It doesn't seem a long time ago; I often see you in my dreams. . . ."

She had been married three days, and if one looked at her one would have thought she had been through an illness. But Harston Migotti, her husband, noticed nothing, for he was absorbed in explaining himself to her.

Her answer to Waldo was brief:

"I've just got your letter. I married Harston Migotti at a registry office nearly a week ago. You were quite right, it was my pride, and there isn't any of it left. I didn't know you loved me, only that I loved you, and wanted to hide it. I ran away to Harston Migotti because I was in a rage with my stepmother; that's the truth. I'm going to do my best, my very best, that he should never know it. Goodbye, don't write to me ever again; I've got to live it through. My stepmother would say: 'As I've made my bed I must lie upon it.' I wish I were lying cold upon it."

It was true she wished it after she had Waldo's letter. This time, at least, she was utterly candid with him. She told him not to write to her again; she had to put him out of her mind, out of her heart.

It has been often said that there is no phenomenon in nature more remarkable than the difference in perspective

between a genius in the distance and a genius in the nearness of the domestic circle. It is not necessary to go back to the time of Milton. Biographies, letters, innumerable diaries, show the greatest philosopher of his age wrangling with his wife over petty details of domestic economy, morbidly selfish, and still more morbidly introspective, his indigestion assuming the proportions of a disaster, and finally of tragedy. And only yesterday the fierce searchlight of the Divorce Court was turned upon an interior where was seen a man who for half a century had held the nation entranced with the magic of his art, living side by side, but never together, with an unhappy and neglected woman he could not hold from throwing up the impossible part of pretending any longer to be his loving or faithful wife; a woman estranged by long silences and queer subtle inhumanities.

What distinguished Harston Migotti from his fellows was his simplicity, his ingenuousness, and, of course, his youth. That, in the effulgence of his genius, his wife or comrade would be eclipsed seemed to him inevitable. He had a gift for the world. At the best, the wife of such a man could have only a gift for him. And perhaps if she had loved him, however clearly she had seen his attitude of mind towards her, she would have accepted it as the right one. As it was, she only saw that he was under a misapprehension, and one that must never be put right.

After Manuella had had Waldo's letter and answered it, there seemed nothing she desired more strongly than to prove to him, to Lord Lyssons who would never know, and to herself who must have this solace, that it was true she was "honest." Passionate she had been, wrong-headed and impetuous. She had wronged Harston little less than herself. She had to amend that wrong, to see that he missed nothing, to meet his needs. Madame Liebius and Gerald Streatfield had told her how this was to be done, although she had not understood them at once. If she had a personality, it was to be effaced, subordinated. If her married life was to be a duet, it was one in

which she must always play the bass; if they were to be one, he was the one they must be.

At eighteen the lesson of personal insignificance is a difficult one to learn. Harston Migotti, her young genius of a husband, did not know that all the time in these first days of his honeymoon he was teaching it to her. He often said how much in love with her he was, and talked of the emotions she gave him, and the influence they would have upon his art.

Although he insisted he was an Englishman, with an English father, and, notwithstanding his Italian mother, he had the German attitude of mind towards women. When his passions moved him he took the response for granted. When they walked out, he went always a little ahead. When he talked, he rarely waited for an answer.

And *how* he talked! He could be silent equally overwhelmingly, but this she did not learn so soon. During that first week at Wargrave, she heard all the story of his life. He talked of it at breakfast and again at dinner, lay in the bottom of the boat and dilated upon its significance; walked between the hedges in the English lanes in gloaming or even-time, and said there would come a day when the romance of his life could not be hidden.

"It is leader of the people I should be perhaps, but instead, I will write their music. A man once said he cared not who made the people's laws if he could make their ballads. It is not ballads I will write, but a National Music; the whole spirit of England shall be in my songs, already it is in all my 'Chariot Queen. . . .'"

She knew that she had made a mistake, blundered irreparably. Everything that was fine in her—and but for her stepmother all might have been fine—went to filament with which to hide the knowledge upon which she would fain not look; she spun cocoon hiding-places for it; some day a butterfly might emerge, very rare and beautiful, but now all she must do was to spin a hiding-place for her mistake.

She had not been a religious girl, but in her loneliness

she felt the necessity of prayer. She began to pray; it was really only a wild call for help, but this was the form it took. "Oh, God, help me to be a good wife to him!" These were the words in which she clothed her self-doubt. She prayed that his egotism should become her egotism, that she should not begin to criticize him.

"I want to be good," she cried, in the passion of revolt and revelation of those early days of her marriage. "Help me to do my duty to him, to give myself up completely. Make me a good wife, dear God! I want to be better than I have been, not to be always sorry and . . . and ashamed. I didn't know what I was doing. . . . I didn't understand. Help me, God!"

Blindly she had run away, bungled into a morass; now she was desperate to find a plank.

"If I do everything he wants, if I never think at all about myself, and live only for him, it will get better? I can't always have this pain at my heart. I will be good. . . ."

She was already a woman, but it was the child's heart that prayed. Later on she found her strength in action and not in prayer. It was the pain of dying childhood that cried and she soon rid herself of the habit.

This was a man of genius to whom she had given herself, a young genius, to whose first passion she was dedicate, consecrate or a mere sacrifice. Her eyes knew hot burning tears, her lips framed prayers, but only at first.

"This will enrich all my art," he whispered.

"I must do whatever he says," her desperate conscience answered. "I ran away from home to marry him; it is all my own fault."

The story of Harston Migotti's life, told to Manuella at such length in these honeymoon days, can be made quite short. Behind the story can be seen his ideals, his dreams, and what inspired them. Justice must be done to him, he had a strange origin.

His first remembrance was of being one of a little family, himself the smallest of them all, in Darmstadt. The mother, whom he called "*Mutterchen,*" but whom he

always knew was not his mother, sang in the theatre. She was Italian, but sang in the German manner, and in Wagner's operas; he did not know how he heard that, but he told it to Manuella as one of his earliest recollections. Her German husband was one of the first violins in the orchestra, and from the time Harston could hear at all, it was always music he heard. Before he was five years old he could play, not only the violin, but the piano, and all the people that came to the little house called him "The Infant Mozart."

Once, and it was not a thing a dreamer of five years old could forget, he heard "*Mutterchen*" say in Italian, which was the first language he learned: "One day he will be a king among musicians." And her husband, who played the violin, and taught him, whom he loved, and looked up to as a child looks up to his master, answered laconically, his finger on a string:

"If he had his rights, it would not be among musicians only that he would be a king."

A belief in some grand and mysterious origin grew with his growth. He was many years older before he knew that he had no rights, no rights at all, not to the name he bore, nor to any name. But by this time the knowledge could not hurt him, for he had his own kingdom, playing by his adopted father's side. In the early years he loved the piano more than the violin. But what he loved most of all was playing his own dreams, the harmonies that came to him. Wide and luminous was that kingdom of his, full of glory. He was conscious of high destiny. What is bastardy to the gods?

The blood of an English prince ran in his own veins, and soon he knew it was to England he would take his gift. He learned the language and history of this country; was it not his own? At eighteen he spoke English almost fluently. The acquisition of languages came naturally to him. He had no hesitation in telling his new wife how easily he learned, and that all Darmstadt was proud of him.

"When I walked in the streets everyone knew me

and turned to look. At five years old I was as beautiful as an angel. My hair hung in curls, like pale gold with the sun on it I was dressed always in velvet. . . ."

Manuella saw the vision he conjured up—the Wonder Child, like Mozart, with the width between his blue eyes, and the broad white brows. She saw him as he played too; the little fingers on the keys, the rapt expression. Harston told her of that quite simply.

"When I played I was absorbed in the music. Sometimes they said I was like John the Baptist, but more often that I was like Mozart. . . ."

It seemed there had always been money for his education; some protecting hand from afar stretched out over those early years.

"I cannot remember when I first heard that my mother died when I was born. She was *Mutterchen's* younger sister. Before she made her first appearance in Opera she met the Prince. He was only eighteen, and she a year younger. Ah! but theirs was a short love dream!"

There was a tradition in the Darmstadt family of a wholly unexpected visit, wholly unexpected because it was understood that it was always to be a secret who was the father of the child they had adopted.

When he came, all the papers were full of the great wedding preparations being made for him in his own country. Afterwards they heard there had been a short paragraph announcing that the bridegroom had contracted a chill, and was confined to his room for a few days. He may have been ill; everybody knew his heart was not in the marriage. But when the papers said he was confined to his room, he made that hurried surreptitious journey to see his son, to bid good-bye to the old life before entering on the new. *Mutterchen* said he looked very young, slender, fair, not at all happy.

"Sometimes I seem to remember him. I know he exclaimed: 'Why, he is quite a little Englishman!' That was because my hair was so fair. They all remember he said that. Very soon afterwards came the news of his death from pneumonia."

Harston had an income; he spoke of it carelessly; it had always been enough for his needs. He told her that money would come quickly enough when the opera was finished. In the meantime, three hundred a year was almost a fortune. He had really been well educated, although music had stood in the way of his studies. He spoke regretfully of a young English tutor who had tried to teach him Latin and Greek. No expense had been spared. Then Steinhault came to Darmstadt, and diverted all his life, creating new ambitions. He wanted to be Steinhault's pupil, but the master no longer took pupils. Harston told his young wife how he had first played to Steinhault.

"He was smoking, steadily puffing away at his pipe, indifferent. I played and he puffed. I began to improvise, he left off puffing. I forgot to think about him, and put my life and my soul into my playing. 'But you are a young fool,' was all he said, 'you cannot play at all. Find me matches. *My pipe has gone out.*' After that he thrust me from the piano-stool and played himself; he played to me—to me alone! There is no one like Steinhault; some day you shall know him."

"I meant him to take me as his pupil," he told Manuella simply. "I always get what I want," he added, just as simply. And up to now it had been true. He won Steinhault, and much, later, when he had learnt all Steinhault could teach him, he won what was far more difficult, the freedom to leave him.

"And now I have you," he finished triumphantly. His hand caressed her hair. The soft warmth of her brought keen, sweet, new pleasures to him; already he heard them in the violins. Love was for strings, he knew that already. He had known it before, through Wagner; but he understood it better now.

He had travelled far with Steinhault, serving and learning. Three times to America, on long concert tours throughout the States, in Russia twice, and at last, only two years ago, he came to England by himself. And here he had stayed. Not Steinhault's insistent letters, nor

all his rage, remonstrance and appeal, could move him from his choice.

"It is my country," I wrote him, "my own country. It is here I will stay, and grow more at home in the language, and study, and it is here I will make my name. In their folk songs I hear their National music, the dumb sleeping music of their nation. I will do for this, my father's country, what Beethoven, Wagner and Schubert have done for Germany, Grieg for Scandinavia, Tschaikowsky for Russia, Debussy for France. I will do all this and more. People shall come from far off to hear my English music, even as they go now to Bayreuth to hear Wagner's."

Steinhault still protested; the pianist, who had neither kith nor kin, commanded, coaxed, stormed at the boy's resolution.

"You shall be my son," he wrote. Harston told this part lightly, but Manuella understood that the harsh man who growled and stormed but never praised, had grown attached to the "Wonder Boy" who had followed him round the world.

"He could teach me no more. I knew I should never play as he played, no one else can play with just that technique. I have more expression; I interpret in my own way, and when I am in a mood. The other night, now, it was to you I was playing; no one could have played the Trio as I played it that night, not Steinhault himself. He would have played it better, perhaps, but not so wonderfully, you understand. It is I who sway the emotions, Steinhault who moves the intellect."

That was almost all the story. He had abandoned Steinhault almost as easily as he had abandoned the Darmstadters, who had so proudly nurtured his youth. The path of a genius is wide and lonely, and what he sees is always far off, in the dim distance. Always in the stretch of firmament above him the sun is behind clouds. It is to fling a radiant glory on his journey's end, the journey that never ends.

"I could have had engagements. Madame Liebius

is also a sister of '*Mutterchen*,' a still younger sister. I could always have played her accompaniments. But that night, that night at your father's house, was the only time I have played for her in public. All the other time, all these two years, I have been studying your language, your folk-songs, the songs of your country-side.

"To leave Steinhault, to stay in England was an impulse; but now I know it was Providence that guided me, that always guides men like me. All of a sudden that night, when no one knew me in the room, and no soul in your great hall, it came to me that I must play to them, must let them hear me. I knew how it would be. But in the end it was to you I played. Now I continue to write. Your England will have its National music, its great opera that will be greater than the *Niebelungen Ring*. We will go home soon now, my little wife, it is singing in my ears all the time, the song *motif* of my opera. It is the 'Wedding March' that interrupted it. But now the 'Wedding March' is written; I have finished with it. Let us go home."

That evening, the evening he said the "Wedding March" was no longer in his head, distracting him, they stood together on the verandah. The words he had used unwittingly struck cold on her hot heart. He stood silent by her side. She saw the moon's reflection on the water, and the shadows stretch from the backwater. The trees were black, the rising mist was grey and sad, and the greyness and sadness were the life to which she would return with him. Already she had learnt, and knew that when he was silent she must not speak. It was in silence he heard his music. All the rare sounds by day, reeds and rushes purling, leaves swaying, water plashing; all the mysterious murmur of night, peewits twittering, wind in the tree tops, the rumble of a distant train, resolved themselves for him into harmonies and discords, into his English music.

"I hear rain," he said. "Hush! I hear rain."

And in five minutes it was upon them, plashing in

great drops on the broad surface of the river. At first it was good to see it fall, making strange lights and sounds in the water, strange shapes too, circles and widening circles, broken circles; but presently she began to shiver. He stood watching a long time after she had gone in. Later he was no longer silent.

"Hardly any one but Wagner has written his own libretto to his own music. But I am writing my own libretto; the words are borne to me in the music. Oh! how well I know your Boadicea and your England:

'Fear not, isle of blowing woodland, isle of silvery parapets,
Tho' the Roman eagle shadow thee, tho' the gathering enemy narrow thee,
Thou shalt wax, and he shall dwindle, thou shalt be the mighty one yet!'

I will write it better than that, but that is my theme. Oh! my wife, my little darling of a wife, how proud you will be of me when I have made my great English Opera, when at last you have a National Music. . . ."

They went home the next day. The rain was still falling, the river grey white, streaked and dirty, empty bottles, baskets, paper and dead fish floating on its wind-swept, rain-swept bosom. She saw it when she leaned from the bedroom window, the cab at the door, the luggage strapped. She was as cold as the river; it was to her youth she said good-bye—to Manuella of the child-heart. Henceforth and for ever she was only Harston Migotti's wife. She would listen to his music. But the grey years would be as the grey river, and she shivered as she shut the window and went down to join him where he stood beside the station cab.

CHAPTER XIV

THEIR married life began in the rooms Harston Migotti had occupied as a bachelor, the rooms in Bedford Square.

"I like them; I feel at home here," he said. Manuella never questioned the arrangement; the days before her marriage were too few, her mind was too numbed.

The house was very old, built in the days when no party-wall was less than two feet thick, when partitions were not mere lath and plaster, nor floors made of only half-inch boards. Everything was strong, silent, substantial. The rooms on the top floor had been the nurseries of the house in the days when it was occupied by the well-known Quaker family of Elias Underwood and Dame Ursula his wife, with their family of thirteen children. There were beams in the ceiling, joists in the wide fireplaces, the little windows with the small panes of glass had deep eaves and quaint gargoyles. The fact that there was no hot water, nor bath, nor sanitation and no electric light, had preserved his solitude to Migotti. He missed none of them. Here he had lived during the two years he had passed in England before his marriage. In the front room was his grand piano, standing upon the moth-eaten carpet that must have lain undisturbed for at least a century. Around him were wood-panelled walls, the paint faded to a greyish brown. There was a rough, ricketty kitchen table, and there were many

chairs, no two of which were alike. In his bedroom were a huge, wooden four-poster, the bedding, once of feathers, now of dust, a common deal washstand with a cracked Derby basin and two jugs, a bow-fronted chest of drawers, a pair of tallboys, a dressing-table like a box with a hand-silvered obscure glass in the lid.

The Misses Underwood, maiden ladies, vague distant relics of the ancient family, kept their poor tradition in the stately empty rooms on the first floor, from which they had sold most of the furniture.

Gerald Streatfield rented a small back room on the lower floor.

Such was the home to which Harston brought his bride. He saw no lack in it.

"I am glad to be at home again," he said to her on the evening they came from Wargrave. "In all London Gerald tells me there is nothing like these rooms, so big and quiet, where I can play all day and all night, where I am alone."

She came to him from Stone House, from Gairoch, where she had the comfort of her own maid, her porcelain bath, the electric lamp by her bed, dainty food brought to her in delicate china, fine glass, lace and embroidered napery.

"They are fine rooms, are they not? Oh! how happy I shall be now that you are here in them with me. I always knew it would be here I should finish my opera."

Within two days of their home-coming he scarcely remembered that he had a wife, that things were any different from what they had been with him a month ago. Then he was but studying, making notes, filling his mind with English folk-lore, and folk-song, the material with which he would work. He was in the white heat of creation before the honeymoon waned, before the month was passed.

Coming up in the train he had talked of Tennyson, and Coleridge, exulting because neither poet had written the story, the great epic.

"Mine will be so different from theirs, it will be true

tone-poetry. My oboes and my flutes will voice woodland England. Already I hear the war-cry of Boadicea ringing triumphantly on the wind."

Sometimes in the streets one sees a barrel-organ, a cradle attached to it, in which, wrapped in rags, lies a sleeping, or whining baby, pale and puny. A swarthy man with a red scarf round his throat turns the handle, a woman with big gilt earrings and white smiling teeth, invites charity and collects coppers. Whenever in the after days Manuella saw such a group, she stopped to look at them, remembering that strange old house, its carved staircase uncarpeted, the walls broken in places, the plaster falling, and the fine cornices covered with spiders' webs. She, too, like that baby, slept and woke to the turning of the handle; she was never away from the sound of her husband's opera. It was immortal music that ran from his trained fingers, that sang gruffly and inadequately from his throat, that filled the rooms. She had called herself musical, hearing music as from an enchanted garden; but the very music of the spheres may sound too close, drowning all else. She was like the baby in the basket, sleeping and waking to sound.

Without Gerald Streatfield she would not have known how to manage her housekeeping; she was bewildered at her position.

Gerald came to her early on the first morning of their homecoming. He knocked at the bedroom door and entered quite without ceremony. Harston was already at the piano, and of course he could not be disturbed.

"I came up early on purpose. He has already started, I find; I heard him as I came up. Do you know where everything is, how to manage? I did it all for him before you came. There is only one little maid-of-all-work. . . ."

Gerald Streatfield is of no more interest to this story than an echo to a voice. He was about eight-and-twenty, wore his hair parted in the middle, and curled his moustache at the ends; he earned his living as an assistant in the music-publishing house of Messrs. Munzay and Co.

But he was an enthusiast, a hero-worshipper, and no mean performer on the violin. When he met Steinhault on the continent he felt capable of kissing the platform upon which his hero's feet had trod. Now it was to Harston Migotti that his enthusiasm was eagerly and swiftly transferred. He became his slavish admirer, his most ardent follower; dreaming of being a Seidl, or a Theodor Uhlig to this English Wagner, or as Nietzsche in the early days. Gerald was well-read in his subject. At the worst he could play Boswell or Pennell, gathering up the fragments of wisdom or discarded notes let fall by the master. Harston Migotti was young, but that he would be a master there was no doubt.

"You won't put me out of your life, you will let me share both your lives? You see, I understand him so well; for nearly two years I have studied his moods," Gerald pleaded to Manuella, before even he had shown her where the big tin bath was kept, under the mouldy bed, and the oil stove at which they cooked, and on which they made tea or coffee.

On the first morning the maid-of-all-work brought up their breakfast.

"I inspected the tray before it came up, I know what he likes," he said enthusiastically. "Of course he would go without food altogether if some one did not look after him. When the mood is on him, the inspiration, he neither eats nor drinks. I have known him go twenty-four hours without food." He said this solemnly; he had underlined it in his diary.

It appeared that neither Harston Migotti nor Gerald took many meals in Bedford Square.

"We go out to restaurants, there are any number of them in the neighbourhood, tea-shops, eating-houses, hotels. Sometimes we go further, into Fleet Street, the Strand, or Leicester Square, it all depends how he feels. I always seem to know, he leaves it to me. 'And where are we going to-day?' he asks, 'I have an appetite like a hunter,' or 'I have no appetite at all!' One never knows with him."

It did not seem in the least strange to Gerald that this young and beautiful girl should be content to share their Bohemian meals, and put up with the same inconveniences. Was it not natural that she should be glad and willing to share any life with Harston Migotti? Because he was a hero-worshipper, and Harston the hero, it seemed to him impossible it could be otherwise with her.

She fell in with his views. If she had blundered no one must ever know it. Perhaps her prayers helped her, perhaps it was only her fineness becoming clear after her yeasty and impetuous youth, but, in any case, she settled to her circumstances, and took up the burden of her days as if love lightened them. Neither Harston nor Gerald, nor any of the few friends who came to the rooms in Bedford Square, doubted that she loved her gifted husband.

After the brief passion of his honeymoon Harston swung back with fresh impetus to his opera. Very soon Manuella knew his ways almost as well as Gerald. He would write or compose for hours, hours during which no one must disturb him. He had no fixed times for meals; he fed on his inspiration. She must be on hand when he emerged, ready to minister to him. Many of these meals were completely silent, his mind was still absent; he was still listening, phrasing, composing. Sometimes, in the midst of them, he would go back hurriedly to his desk or his piano.

The music came to him more easily than the libretto. This she gathered from him or from Gerald. She understood quickly that he did not like to be questioned about his work. If he was in the humour to talk of it all was well, but even then he resented questioning. His temper was extraordinarily uneven, his hours of sociability as rare as pockets in an alluvial mine. He was passionately in love with his young wife, or so he believed. But in reality he loved and worshipped only his gift and she was but a hand-maiden in the outer temple. She learnt to serve; that was the hard lesson of those early months of her married life—to wait and serve.

When his work flagged and his inspiration failed, he would go for long, solitary walks. Gerald told her that exercise was necessary to him, and loneliness inevitable.

"He hears when he is alone," he explained, with something of awe upon him. "You can understand that, can't you? We interrupt him when we speak, or when he is conscious of our presence; he is listening to something we cannot hear."

He was sometimes out for eight and twelve hours; tramping the Embankment, or further afield, on the Heath at Hampstead or in the lanes of Hendon, hearing new melodies, harmonies beyond the telling, song and intersong. But he never heard the beat of that lonely or rebellious heart that lay at night beside his own. He thought he was all a husband should be to her, often passionately fond.

She had to find occupation to justify and fill her days. Ultimately she worked at her strange housekeeping with all the energy of her incoherent despair. It proved incredibly helpful; what, in the beginning, was an uncongenial necessity, became, in the end, and comparatively soon, a grateful alternative to idleness, and an incentive to exert her intelligence. She found she, too, had gifts, and began to exercise them. She was less unhappy after that, her conscience applauding her. She could at least make home for him.

The large and airy rooms were almost incredibly dirty when she came to them. She found it out, and Gerald admitted it ruefully. There was only one maid-servant, and there were many stairs.

"He hates to have anything disturbed. . . ."

Because Harston hated to have anything disturbed, Manuella's task was more difficult, and perhaps on that account better worth doing. Cleanliness was essential to her and it had to be accomplished when he was out. Her own indefatigable personal energy was supplemented by the hurriedly-summoned charwoman. There was fortunately no lack of money. Harston willingly handed over his income to her.

"I don't want to have anything but my opera in my mind. Do what you like with the money, only do not weary me about it. That is a wife's function, to make it go far. I am sure my beloved will know how it is done. Gerald says I am extravagant, but now you will be my purse-bearer."

It was wonderful how quickly she grew to her responsibilities; Gerald was always at hand to help. He knew, for instance, that Harston's capital was invested in some stock, the interest of which was paid quarterly. A quarter's income became due a few days after they came home from Wargrave, and it was then Harston pushed the cheque over to her, and said she was to do what she liked with the money.

No one would have believed the millionaire's daughter would become so quickly practical, or what a help it was to her to have things to do. She learnt makeshift from Gerald, and something from the charwoman, but much was her own discovery. The floors were scrubbed, made aromatic with soap and soda. She bought a new carpet, a mattress, a large double washstand, a second bath. Tottenham Court Road was handy; she may be said to have gone to school at Shoolbred's. There were incredible difficulties to be overcome, of which not the least was that all work had to be stopped when Harston was at home. Gas was already laid on downstairs; it had to be brought upstairs, and trained to a cooking-stove. It was some compensation that the top floor was really roomy; the wide landing sufficient for both kitchen and larder. The Brothers Adam had been liberal in cupboards; one of these, when the shelves were taken out, was made to hold a geyser and the new bath. She found solace in making these contrivances, in shopping, marketing, and learning to cook. When Harston awoke from a day and a half of complete silence to praise the coffee it seemed to make everything worth while. Her omelettes and toast, the different ways in which she found eggs could be cooked, interested, and almost absorbed, her. It was of little consequence that she spoiled a few things;

she could afford to replace them. Seventy pounds for three months seemed an almost inexhaustible sum when it went out in a shilling's worth of eggs, or sevenpence for half a pound of butter.

The little maid-of-all-work downstairs was subsidized, and ran up and down, helping willingly, in many ways. Manuella found she liked her housekeeping, but what she liked best of all was mending Harston's and her own clothes—Gerald's too, presently. Her foreign education served her in good stead. She could darn exquisitely, sew on buttons that did not come off, patch and mend and put in gussets.

They were not unhappy months when she was occupied with these things, making home for them all. Each day had its duties, almost every hour. There was always a new pudding to learn, or a fresh disposition of the household utensils to make; her wants grew, but they were such simple wants; new shelves, or pots and pans, a whisk or a cherry-stoner; easily supplied. Harston had no longer to seek his food in a restaurant when he was hungry. She was proud to improvize a meal for him, or for Gerald when he came upstairs. She kept material handy—eggs always, potted meat, jams, all manner of tinned things. And when she acquired a small upright refrigerator in which she could store butter, fish, or chops, she seemed to have reached her housekeeping millennium.

If only she had never been told she had a voice, never repeated the encomiums on it to Harston!

There came a stage in the progress of the opera when its creator wanted active sympathy, open applause, help and encouragement. There was Harston at the piano, Gerald with his violin. It was when Harston said:

"And Manuella will sing for us," that she began to doubt. She knew herself untrained, a few months with De Lausan could hardly be counted; the music in her had been deadened and stifled by Harston's. She had not practised, had forgotten what little she knew. . . . But no pleading nor nervousness prevailed against his insistence.

"Nonsense! nonsense! I will teach you, train you. Begin . . ." he struck a chord, then played the whole song through. It was the song known now as "The Invocation."

She certainly had a voice, naturally well placed, and when she got over her first nervousness, neither man could doubt it. It was unspoiled by forcing, of wide range, true as the voice of a bird. Harston's accompaniment had a magnetic quality; his own voice was that of a bull, but when he raised it, as he often did in teaching, it enriched hers. Perhaps he heard them only in unison. Certainly he came to think her voice adequate. She was glad to be of this help to him; she remembered what he told her, tried to express him, strove to become dramatic. She worked at her music vehemently in the intervals of her housekeeping, carrying out her vows. It was all for the service of Harston. She found no difficulty in throwing herself into the part of Boadicea. She felt the anguish of the outraged Queen, and all her agony, practised self-abandonment in declamation, wished that her hair were of gold instead of black, and began to live in the opera. All three of them lived in it as it grew into a thing of rare beauty.

CHAPTER XV

THERE came the great day when the opera was actually finished. To Harston himself, and to that enthusiastic young Boswell, Gerald Streatfield, it seemed that, with the final chords, as they crashed from the piano in the exultant finale, a whole new and splendid era of English national music dawned. There was not a doubt in either of their minds that the opera had only to be heard to be accepted, and hailed as a masterpiece. Their talk was never out of key; their minds moved as one. The Wonder Child had justified the great omen of his birth. Never could he be content to become even a superlative pianist, to rival Steinhault; his dream of destiny was always to become a great composer. Now he saw himself also as his own librettist, the man who had done for England what Wagner had done for Germany. Who that would hear *The Chariot Queen* could doubt this? The whole heart and soul of Britain were in his work, all the legends of the people, their traditions, their inspirations and their songs. His confidence was supreme; there was nothing mundane or material about it; it was of the spirit—uplifting, ennobling, complete.

Harston Migotti had written a Symphony when he was eighteen, and without any difficulty it had been produced in Darmstadt and had achieved a distinct success. His "Wedding March," that was to rival Mendelssohn's, and the one in *Lohengrin,* was in the hands of Gerald Streat-

field's firm, accepted and only awaiting the right season for publication. Difficulty, failure, non-appreciation, were unknown words in the dictionary of his short life. For two years he had been studying, writing, composing, now fruition was at hand. Of course it would gain immediate recognition, adequate production. There was much to be thought of, but he had no doubt of the triumph awaiting him, no possible shadow of doubt.

It is true that no artist is ever completely satisfied with his work, and to that rule Harston Migotti was no exception; he meant to touch and retouch, strengthen, deepen, polish. But he was on fire to hear its representation in full volume, with a great orchestra, to see the *mise-en-scène* as he had projected it, the Roman legionaries burning the groves and altars of the Druids; Boadicea in her chariot, her wild hair flowing:

> Phantom sound of blows descending, moan of enemy massacred.
> Phantom wail of women and children, multitudinous agonies.

And the lighter scenes, Boadicea's daughters with their fierce Roman lovers, all the court of Suetonius Paulinus, and the fine recitative of the outraged maidens, the chorus of the Druids:

> Sounds, not arms, shall win the prize,
> Harmony the path to fame.

He wanted to see and hear it all, and be filled with the whole sequence from overture to finale. Before the great day of completion Gerald had arranged a selection from the music in the first act as a suite for the piano, with which his firm had expressed themselves charmed. A vital question was whether to ask Clara Cue to sing the song in the second act at her grand annual concert in the Albert Hall:

> Fear not, isle of blowing woodland, isle of silvery parapets,
> Though the Roman eagle shadow thee, though thy mercenaries menace thee,
> Thou shalt wax and they shall dwindle, thou shalt be the mightier yet!

In the end, however, they decided against this proposi-

tion, resolved that the bloom must not be taken off the first production.

Gerald was enthusiastic, and Harston seemed alight, radiant, no doubt or shadow crossing his faith in his work.

Manuella's attitude towards her husband had changed. If love had not come with service, belief had. When Harston wrote and played, full of his music as a globe of light, she was ready to admit she was married to a young god, to worship and to guard the flame before the altar. When the lamp burned low, and he was her husband, more human than God-like, she cooked and darned for him dutifully. She had grown at peace with herself through serving him.

On the Sunday before the opera was finished, the end actually in sight, Gerald was inspired to suggest that a National theatre should be built for it, that the King and Queen would desire to take the lead in acknowledging such a gift to them and to their people. Stated in cold print this may well look ridiculous. In that panelled room in Bedford Square, where the piano stood, it appeared not only feasible, but almost inevitable. Was this not the first great English Opera, the precursor of others to come? And there was Bayreuth to guide them.

"But what have they got that could be made into a Bayreuth? Sandringham is too small, Scotland too far off. . . ." Migotti had a stranger's knowledge of the country he called his own.

From Manuella came the suggestion of Windsor.

"Windsor Forest! Of course, just the place—ideal!" Gerald, fired by the idea, was sure a theatre would be built in Windsor Forest for the production of *The Chariot Queen*.

"Why not go down and find a site, see what could be done? You are not working any more today?"

It was early spring, the excursion was planned quickly; in moments like this Gerald showed his abilities.

"We can catch a two-o'clock train from Paddington; we shall be in Windsor before three. I know there is an

express that only stops at Slough. It will be daylight until after six."

They actually caught the train. Harston was in holiday spirits, more German than he knew at the prospect of an excursion in a forest. Gerald was full of the theatre, imagined the building, tier upon tier, and the people who would throng there.

"You know this will make an enormous difference, not only to Windsor, but to Datchet and Slough, and as far as Maidenhead. They will have to build new hotels. . . ." Gerald saw speculators buying land and building capaciously, multitudinously; he wished he had capital to invest.

In the third-class carriage which they had to themselves Harston bawled a few bars of the "Song of the Thames"; but presently he would talk no more of the opera or the theatre; he would only speak enthusiastically of England, looking out of the window and drawing Manuella's or Gerald's attention to tree or sky, or shifting panorama of the landscape. They passed mean suburban houses of red brick, long roads where passing motors left trailing clouds of dust, trees backward in budding, with sparse stems, and he found it all admirable, national, characteristic.

But when they got to the Forest everything was different. The day, it is true, was no longer warm, and the trees were hardly in bud. He found the paths too wide and ordered, the vistas narrow and confined, and a suitable site for the theatre was difficult to imagine. But Gerald's enthusiasm carried them through, and Harston's spirits never flagged. He called Manuella his *liebchen* and his sweetheart: his energy was enormous, he was untiring in walking, and he showed a real sense of topography, discovering in time that the Forest was no maze, but that the many roads converged to a centre. He found where the Great Park encroached on the Forest land, and the many points from which one saw the Castle and the river. He it was who ultimately discovered the very place for the theatre, and even before Gerald

realized its advantages, Harston began to plan what trees must come down and what space would have to be cleared.

Manuella plodded after them like a German housewife. She was unused to walking, soon tired, and at the end of the day most desperately weary, hardly able to keep up her dragging steps. She was a little embittered by her fatigue, slightly out of temper. She began to see that their plans were only so much futile talk, to know that the King and Queen would not cut down their forest and clear a space for Harston and Gerald to build a theatre. Of course, she believed in the opera and in Harston's genius; without such belief life would have been insupportable, but she could not take this talk of theirs seriously.

They had tea at the station. Her legs ached and her back ached, her feet were hot and blistered; there were shadows under her eyes, her cheeks were sallow, at a word her temper flared. She did not want to pour out the tea, cut bread and butter, or spread jam for them. Harston had learnt to expect all these things from her; he ate like a German on a holiday, with gusto, abandonment, quite voraciously.

"But go, go on! Cut more, cut thicker slices." His mouth was full as he spoke.

"Cut some yourself." She pushed the loaf over to him before he had half finished. "I can't cut you any more, I'm tired."

He did not understand at all.

"Oh, no! but that is impossible. I cannot cut bread and butter for myself, nor spread the jam. And I must have another cup of tea—a large cup, strong. I have a great thirst. . . ."

This was the first time there had been anything like a scene between them. Manuella was for ever unreal with Harston, playing the part she had assigned herself. Over-fatigue was responsible for the childishness of her behaviour this afternoon at the round marble-topped table in the dingy refreshment-room of the railway station. She said she wouldn't cut any more bread, and

she wouldn't pour out any more tea; she was sick of waiting upon him. Harston was astonished, Gerald grieved; both of them made matters worse by sympathy, kindness, too much talk.

"But you are ill. . . ."

"We've overtired you!"

"I'm not ill, I'm quite well. I'm not tired."

"But you are cross!"

She even cried presently, tears of rage; they could not understand her at all. Their high spirits were damped and destroyed, the whole excursion spoilt. On the way home in the third-class carriage, overfull with other excursionists, she lay back silent and repentant in the corner, acutely conscious that both Harston and Gerald were watching her uncomprehendingly, as if they saw her for the first time, and did not know how rightly to deal with so strange a phenomenon. She was infuriated when they asked her again if she were tired. They did not speak of the theatre, they were so engaged in wondering what had come to her.

When they got home she made no effort to prepare supper for them, she went straight to bed, her temper not yet restored. But she was quite disgusted with herself and convinced that her stepmother had been right. She had no excuse for herself, she felt wretched and ashamed, but convinced, nevertheless, that all the talk had been ridiculous, and the long walk in search of a site merely waste of energy.

In a way, Gerald and Harston, sitting over supper, came to the same conclusion. They dismissed the strangeness of her conduct, Harston with a shrug and Gerald with a sigh.

"We walked too far for her."

"She could surely have said so!"

"She will be all right in the morning."

"I shall have to work all the morning."

"You will be finished by Wednesday?"

"By Wednesday my score will be ready."

They discussed the writing out, the copying, then they

came back to the question of the theatre. It would be a year, two years, before a theatre could be built. To wait was of course impossible. The excursion had been only a holiday. The theatre of their dreams was for the future, the far distant future. Of course, they had realized this all the time; there was small need for Manuella to point out their folly to them. She had not spared them, but of course they knew. The opera must first be produced at The Grand Capitol. They spoke of the production at The Grand Capitol as they sat talking after supper, talking long into the night.

"I will take the score to him myself and play certain parts to him."

"You are going to tell him that you will yourself take the rehearsals, conduct the first performance! But . . ."

Harston was in no humour to listen to buts. And, after all, Gerald was only an echo, never a voice. They were both very young, and Harston knew as little about the production of opera in England as he did about women. He thought everything was going to be easy, quite plain sailing. For a masterpiece there is always opportunity. To-night, over that disordered supper-table, which showed the worse for Manuella's absence, he was as definite and dogmatic as if he were Mascagni, or Strauss, and could dictate terms.

"The house will have to be remodelled. Reinhardt and Craig are all very well in their way, but I have gone beyond them. All the theatre must be part of the scenery, so that the atmosphere is preserved. The audience will be part of the atmosphere, assisting the tragedy, not merely spectators. . . ."

As he talked he saw Stonehenge and the Druids, the great scene of the sacrifice, the Court of Paulinus, Boadicea crying alone in the wilderness, or valiantly leading her followers.

"Hear, Icenian, Catienchlanian, hear Coritanian, Trinobant!"

He heard, he saw them all. His eyes were alight. It was all in his opera. Like a God he had recreated ancient

Britain with music and deep undercurrents of spirit-sound. In the Overture, and in the choruses, this cradle of a race, this birthplace of a nation, this battle-song and prophecy, this wailing and rejoicing was one homogeneous whole. It was not natural for him to turn aside from such a vision to think of a scolding girl, overtired perhaps, certainly ill-tempered. He was not angry with her, but she may have dropped a little in importance. Perhaps already she disappointed him.

* * * * * *

Harston Migotti had been in the train of Steinhault, the great artist, whom crowned heads had united to honour, to whom palaces had been open, and who was acclaimed wherever he went. Perhaps not unnaturally, he compared himself with that triumphant Steinhault, and to his own advantage. Steinhault played other men's music superbly, incomparably. But *he,* Migotti, was poet and composer. That Pan should play and the hurrying, busy world of men not stay to listen was a contingency outside the sweep of his soaring imagination. He lived in a dream-world that he bestrode like a Colossus, and, enveloped by a rarefied atmosphere of adulation, the dazzling light of his supreme self-confidence made him see the actual world but dimly. Vested interests were a sordid something of which he had never heard, an empty phrase for little men.

It seems impossible that he should have had no doubt nor misgiving lest he should be denied a hearing. But the impossible is true. With difficulty Gerald persuaded him to write to Madame Liebius for an introduction to the impresario of the Opera House. The score had to be transcribed, there must needs be a waiting time. Madame Liebius replied:

"The end—no, the beginning has come at last; then the great, great work is complete. Oh! how I long to hear it, see it—our Wonder Boy! Of course I will write to Brian O'Neill. I am singing for him this season. Who will create the part of your Chariot Queen? You must

write me everything. In two months I will be in England."

There was more in the letter, but that was the gist of her message. The one that went with the score to Brian O'Neill was even more enthusiastic. She spoke of Harston Migotti's genius, and said it was a great privilege that Brian O'Neill should have the opportunity of introducing him to the public in England. She knew exactly what to say.

After the score and the letter had been posted, they waited, and waited, and waited. Harston, the least impatient, because there was always something more to be done. For eight and ten hours a day he was at the piano, or with his head bent over the score. Nearly three weeks passed before he remembered to wonder why no answer had come from the Opera House.

Then he concluded that O'Neill was not in England, or, at least, not in London. In the end, Harston decided he must go and see him; it would be infamous if O'Neill had already put the opera into rehearsal without consulting the writer!

Manuella had, of course, recovered her temper, if not her spirits, long before this. She had even said she was sorry; and Harston, who by that time—it was only the next day—had forgotten the incident, kissed her and called her *"Schätzchen,"* and praised an omelette she made for him. Naturally, when he was so occupied in alterations and additions he could not question, or interest himself in, his young wife. Gerald noticed she was not looking well, and said feelingly to her: "Of course, this is a trying time for you and me. *He* has no anxiety; it is wonderful to see how calm he is. Now, I, I can hardly sleep, and I suppose you, too, pass sleepless nights?"

Harston went to see Mr. Brian O'Neill, fearing lest the opera should have been put into rehearsal, or even tried with an orchestra, without his being present!

He had not written for an appointment, and he was

kept waiting, first in the lobby of the theatre, and then, after he had sent in his card, in the anteroom of the manager's office. When at last he was asked to enter, O'Neill, who had interviewed already about fourteen prima-donnas, various chorus masters, *ballets divertisseuses,* entrepreneurs, and Heaven knows whom besides, had forgotten why he had consented to see him. He had, at the back of his mind, some association with the name, but he could not for the moment recall the circumstance. The letter from Madame Liebius, the parcel that had come with it, the name of Harston Migotti, had all escaped him.

He was courteous, of course, in his temporary lapse of memory, with that hurried perfunctory courtesy that is so very little removed from indifference. He waited for the man himself to give him the clue. Possibly it was about an engagement. He put on his "And-what-can-I-do-for-you?" air, and leaned back in his chair.

This was Harston Migotti's chance, had he but understood and taken it. Here he was, in the great man's room, assured for the moment, at least, of his attention. Harston was a young man with a personality, and as we know, of striking appearance; already Brian O'Neill had glanced at him with interest. He had only to accentuate that interest, establish it. Everybody knows that Brian O'Neill is generous, expansive, keen to secure new talent. A few words from Harston would have been sufficient, a few tactful words about the manager's services to music, the last successful season, the promise of the new one under his management . . . O'Neill had had an extremely busy morning, Migotti's name was unfamiliar to him, but certainly he would have listened if the right methods had been employed.

"I am Migotti. Harston Migotti." So abruptly Harston began, without a word of recognition of his hearer's great position, or his complaisance in receiving artists.

"To be sure . . . Migotti! And what can I do for you, Mr. Migotti? Be seated; be seated, please. I've hardly five minutes to spare. Let me see, it was the

Duchess of Landale . . . no." He was turning over a filed sheet of notes. Who *had* written to him about the man? Did he sing? What the devil had he promised to do for him?

"You have the score of my opera." Harston did not understand this indifferent man. "It is I who have written *The Chariot Queen,* the libretto, and the music."

"Oh! of course, I recollect quite well now. The 'First English Opera.'" He had found the note. "But, my dear fellow, don't you know that there are dozens of English operas? 'An English National Music . . .'" he was still reading. "Yes, yes, of course. Druids, and that sort of thing."

He was quite pleasant, if a little patronizing. He remembered the pretentiousness with which the score had been forwarded to him and that he had had no time to look at it. He struck the bell on the table sharply. He told the secretary who answered it to be quick and find the parcel that had come with the letter from Madame Liebius. Doubtless he meant to glance at it then and there, to be kind, and even encouraging, to the young composer. After all, to have written and composed an opera—any opera, at the age of the young man before him, was very creditable, showed industry, enterprise. He went on talking whilst they waited for the parcel to be found.

"Where did you get your musical education? In England? I don't seem to have heard your name before. Were you at the Academy, or the Guildhall? You have done other work, of course?"

His tone was perfunctory, perhaps, but he was certainly kindly and courteous. Harston hardly yet realized that the announcement of his name, and the fact that he was the composer of *The Chariot Queen,* had failed of effect. He had not taken the seat indicated to him; he stood with his hat in his hand, and his most uncompromising expression. When O'Neill spoke of other English operas, he could not disguise his contempt.

"But they don't count, they don't count at all."

O'Neill looked at him questioningly, with a certain surprise and stopped his questions. Harston took advantage of the pause.

"Mine is a National Opera, not like any other. In Italy, in France, and in Germany they have a National Music, but not in England. . . ."

Then he mentioned the names of two English composers; and tore their work to pieces in a phrase.

Brian O'Neill actually reddened; the two composers in question had been his own discoveries, his own novelties of last season, presented by him to the limited opera-going public. Certainly they had been only fairly well received, but the young man was impertinent, presuming. The secretary at this moment brought the mislaid parcel. He took it and untied the strings. Migotti saw that it had not been opened!

"You have not looked at my opera!" he exclaimed. Of course, that was the explanation. How could the man know the difference between his opera and every other that had been written if he had not looked at it? He would have to play it to him. His eyes roved for a piano. Yes! there it was, an Erard grand standing open. Brian O'Neill saw the direction of his eyes. He said pleasantly, for he had recovered his self-possession and superficial agreeability:

"Do you realize that I have some dozen operas brought or sent to me every week? I am a very busy man, Mr. Migotti."

"But mine is not an ordinary opera!" Harston Migotti was amazed that this had not been understood.

"Of course not!"

And *sotto voce* he added: "They never are!"

He had untied the string; he was looking through the overture, now humming a bar or two under his breath.

But it was not a bar of *The Chariot Queen* that he was humming. His mind was upon the opera brought him that morning by a peer, one of the richest men in England, who was prepared to put up any amount of money to have it staged. Already he was wondering if it were

possible, if some special professional skill could make it producible. His eyes were on Migotti's MSS., but his mind, that versatile, agile mind of his, had suddenly reverted elsewhere.

Migotti could not make out what passage he was trying to materialize; he went quite naturally to the piano, adjusted the stool, and sat down. When he began to play, O'Neill was really overwhelmed by his temerity. He had not been asked to play, no permission had been given. But when, not content with playing, Harston started to thunder out in his impossible voice:

"Hear, Icenian, Catienchlanian, hear Coritanian, Trinobant!"

O'Neill became convinced that the fellow was mad, actually stark, staring mad! He was a handsome fellow, and could play the piano, but that he was mad, the Great Man of the Opera House, who had given him no permission to play, and certainly none to sing, had no doubt. "And a damned nuisance to boot. . . ." was how he finished the sentence in his own mind. "Damn it, he's bellowing like a bull. . . ."

How to silence him, how to get rid of him, was the immediate question. He had Lord Swanage's offer to consider; Lord Swanage was coming back in the afternoon for his answer. Brian O'Neill never heard the trumpet effect, or the fanfaronnade that introduced the chorus in the second act, nor the Invocation. . . . A long time was to elapse before he knew, in common with the whole world, the whole music-loving world, that he was listening to what is now admittedly the finest and most characteristic aria heard on our own, or any, stage since *Tannhäuser*. To him, the piano and Migotti's dreadful voice, and the aria, were only obstructions to his day's work, to the immediate work that pressed. He did not know how to put a stop to it, how to tell the musician that this was not the way to obtain consideration for his

opera. It seemed impossible to stop Migotti at the piano, thundering out selections from the score.

Brian O'Neill took the path of least resistance; he escaped from the room. When Migotti took his fingers from the keys, and swung round on the stool, in the expectation of seeing the man entranced, overwhelmed, ready to embrace him, and place the house, the artists, everybody and everything at his disposal, he was confronted by a totally unexpected figure, a dogmatic young man in glasses, who said:

"I say, don't you know you oughtn't to make such a row here? We can hear you on the stage. Don't you know we are at rehearsal?"

He gazed at Migotti through his round glasses, and Migotti flung back his head with its mane of fair hair and stared back at him. He had almost forgotten where he was, he had been so absorbed in his beautiful music. Mr. O'Neill's secretary continued more mildly, his instructions had been definite.

"Get rid of him for me. Tell him I'll consider his opera; tell him we are full up for the season, but I'll look it over before the next. Tell him any damn thing; only get rid of him. Politely, if possible; but ged rid of him. He is a protégé of Liebius, a genius, a crank. Oh, Lord! listen to him. . . ."

"But Mr. O'Neill . . . where is Mr. O'Neill?" exclaimed Harston from the piano-stool. Now the secretary could hear his own voice, and execute his commission properly. He smiled, he beamed:

"He told me to offer you his apologies. He is really so overwhelmed with work just now. About your opera: he told me to tell you he is going to give it the most careful consideration. Of course, for this season you know we have made our engagements. . . ."

"Do you mean to tell me that your master has not even heard what I've played him; that the finest, the most original and astonishing music that has been written since *Siegfried* has not kept him here. . . .?" It was really astounding, incredible; his fair face flushed.

"He will consider it, he will certainly consider it," the secretary had a soothing, almost cooing manner—"but not now, not just now. In six months, perhaps, or in twelve. . . ." He thought he was obeying his instructions with complete tact. "You may leave your work with him, he told me to say so. . . ."

He was never more astonished in his life than when the musician, red in the face, and "like a madman," so he recorded the scene, burst into a fury of words, the gist of which was that O'Neill did not know music when he heard it, was not capable of understanding anything better than opera bouffe or musical comedy, that he was not worthy to produce *The Chariot Queen,* and now would never be allowed to do so.

Harston Migotti seized the parcel that still lay only half-opened on the table; he would have rushed away without his hat, but the secretary followed him to the door and tactfully handed it to him.

"I say, you know. You must not take things like that. Mr. O'Neill is awfully interested. You must tell Madame Liebius that he said he was very much obliged to her for giving him the opportunity. . . ."

Migotti was flying down the stairs before the mild young man had brought out half the speeches that are used on similar occasions. But he had a certain sense of satisfaction, for he had executed the essential part of his commission, and "got rid of the fellow."

CHAPTER XVI

FOR a few days Harston said nothing about this visit to either Manuella or Gerald. He brooded over it, and went long, solitary walks. Surely his opera was beautiful! He spent hours at the piano, or over the score, wondering.

They knew better than to question him, although Gerald at least, was overwhelmed with curiosity. It was the first rebuff of which the young musician had ever been conscious. The fit of fury in O'Neill's room had been followed by a bewilderment of anger, into which doubt intruded. But he pondered, and re-read the music, and played it, and felt there was no room for doubt.

When, in about a week's time, he had reassured himself, he told them what had happened. Of course, Gerald found a hundred excuses and explanations. Manuella, too, although already she took only a secondary place in their councils, did not think it proved anything but Mr. O'Neill's incapacity for the position he held.

"Considering that he never looked at the score, and, when you played it, he did not listen, it is not a personal matter at all, nothing to do with the opera. You say the parcel had never been opened."

"I played it to him; I played the Invocation!"

"But he wasn't in the room."

"He was in the room when I began to play."

"Then, someone must have called him away."

"But he could have returned; surely he could have returned?"

"We don't know what kept him."

"Nothing should have kept him. I continued to play. . . ."

It was deplorable, but worse, of course, for Brian O'Neill and the Grand Capitol audiences, than for Harston Migotti, who had only to wait. . . . But it was impossible to wait.

"Let me take it to John Otterstein. He has forgotten more about music than O'Neill ever knew," Gerald pleaded.

But Harston had lost something of his supreme self-confidence. It was as if he were a child, and had been unexpectedly, undeservedly struck and was still bewildered by the blow. They had to make him forget, to prove to him he had done nothing wrong, but had offered a precious stone, brilliant and unmatchable. It was not his fault if it had been mistaken for a common pebble. At times, of course, he assumed a different attitude; he was not the child, but the master, knowing it was a diamond of the finest water he had found and set. Nevertheless, Gerald had to urge Otterstein upon him.

"He has his own theatre, and can do what he likes there; not like O'Neill, who, after all, acts for a syndicate, and not for himself. Look what Otterstein did in America. And he's got the public; he's impressed them."

In the end they all became persuaded that the new house on the Embankment, "The Ambassadors," was the right house, pending the building of that ideal theatre out in Windsor Forest, and that John Otterstein was the right man.

Harston, although a little less self-confident, was no less obstinate.

"This time I will not ask Madame Liebius for an introduction. I shall write to him myself, and I will send him the Overture. That is all I will send him, for it is enough. It is that, or the whole opera, and he, too,

might say he had no time, was too busy to consider it. For the Overture he will have time."

That letter of Harston's was perhaps responsible for the result. Some day it will be in the British Museum, John Otterstein has promised it. But when it came to him first he laughed—he only laughed!

"DEAR SIR,

"I send you with this the Overture, and the text, of my opera *The Chariot Queen*. You will see for yourself that it is unlike anything that has been done before. But with the rest of it you will perhaps be more surprised. I wish it produced this season, and with as little delay as possible. I will myself undertake the rehearsals, and conduct at the performances. The scenery will necessitate some alterations in the construction of the theatre, which can be put in hand at once. I should like an interview with you when you have considered the Overture, and then I will tell you all my plan.

"MIGOTTI."

Gerald thought there should be more in the letter about Migotti's intention to found a School of English National Music. But Harston said that when he saw John Otterstein it would be time enough.

It certainly never entered either of their heads that the letter would be looked upon as a joke, treated as a hoax, handed round, and laughed at. Yet that is what actually occurred. And the answer was intended to be witty.

"Mr. Otterstein is obliged to 'Migotti' for his friendly offer of rebuilding 'The Ambassadors,' and producing, conducting and rehearsing his work, but suggests that for opera bouffe some other house would perhaps be more suitable."

What the reply meant none of them could understand; it was completely incomprehensible. Opera bouffe!

The Overture of *The Chariot Queen*—opera bouffe! What did it mean? Gerald was as ready as ever with explanation.

"Did you put your note in the parcel with the Overture? Of course not. That's what has happened; they've got separated. He gets a lot of stuff, and it is even possible someone has hit upon the same title. What isn't possible is to call *The Chariot Queen* opera bouffe! It's absurd to get the hump over it. . . ."

But for the moment nothing could be done with Harston. He had not even words for argument.

Manuella and Gerald argued with each other as to what was best to do now, and recalled instances where genius had failed of instant recognition. In the end Manuella herself wrote to Mr. Otterstein, asking if he had received the Overture and text of her husband's opera, *The Chariot Queen,* and enclosing the note about the opera bouffe, which she said she thought must be meant for someone else.

When Mr. Otterstein received these and understood that *The Chariot Queen* letter was not a hoax, nor the production of a humorist who wished to "draw" him, he caused quite a nice, thoroughly American reply to be sent to the lady. He had not time to look at either music or text, but dictating amiable letters was one of his gifts.

"My dear Madam,

"As you say, the letter enclosed was sent in error. I was exceedingly interested in your husband's valuable and most original work. I am returning it to you by this mail, as it is my misfortune at the moment to have no opening for it. With my best wishes, nevertheless, for his ultimate success, of which I am sure there can be no doubt, I remain,

"Faithfully yours,

"John Otterstein."

The letter was opened by Manuella in the presence of Gerald, and was found alternately to be encouraging and

discouraging. Manuella was for writing again to find out when he would have an opening. Gerald, undoing the parcel, had his misgivings that it was intact as it had been sent.

It was incredible to him that Harston Migotti was to join the ranks of those unrecognized geniuses, unacted or unsung, unpublished or unpurchased, of whom the annals of art and literature are full.

As for Harston, he had fits of rage, when he would thump the piano and break into wild diatribes of anger against the music that was produced, the people who produced it, the critics who praised it. But, as time went on, these wild fits of rage were interspersed with attacks of profound and, to those two who watched him, torturing depression, in which they could do little or nothing to help him. He did not lose faith in himself or *The Chariot Queen,* but he lost faith, or seemed to be on the brink of losing faith, in humanity, in justice. During one whole week he would neither play nor compose, and the piano was kept closed. He took long solitary walks, absenting himself from them for intolerably anxious hours. His health seemed to fail, yet he complained of nothing; indeed, he hardly talked at all. But he grew thin, and his eyes, under the pent brows, seemed to have sunk back into his head; his cheeks were hollow. It was the first time disappointment had come near him, or disillusionment. The "I am Migotti" attitude had buoyed all his youth. His intellect was so acute, his spirit so proud, that his position was now intolerable. He saw a new Migotti, one that had failed—failed of a hearing. His rages were like demons that desecrated his soul, and his soul was seared and grew unfit for song.

The two who watched him took constant counsel. To their credit it may be recorded that they never wavered in their belief in him.

The tenderness Manuella discovered in her heart towards her husband at this period was very like love, and might have grown into love. She, too, had known disappointment, disillusionment; her sympathy flowed to

him. If it took the form of preparing dishes that he rarely ate, and never noticed, of redoubling her domestic cares and solicitudes for him, this was because she could think of nothing better.

Out of the misery of those disordered days was born a question. Gerald asked her one day when they were as usual alone, Migotti ever more restless, wandering somewhere with his tortured spirit: "Would not your father help?"

He put it with some hesitation, knowing, of course, that Manuella had married without her father's consent. It had always been tacitly understood that she would seek forgiveness when the success of the opera justified her faith; understood, that is to say, by Gerald and Harston himself. Manuella had no illusions.

The papers were full of Sir Hubert Wagner when Gerald asked the question. The illustrated weeklies had his photograph and that of Lœtitia. Sir Hubert, not completely recovered from his recent illness, was propitiating the Deity by a huge gift towards the establishment of an endowed Protestant Church in Johannesburg. He was going out himself to assist in laying the first stone of a great cathedral.

"He has given two hundred and fifty thousand pounds towards an endowment, and he is going to build six churches. Wouldn't he do something for a National Opera House? He would get just as much, or more, kudos out of it. . . ."

"I have never heard one word from them since my marriage; I believe he has forgotten my existence. There is not an earthly chance of their doing anything to help me or him, and I wouldn't ask them. You don't know my stepmother. I want her to think I am quite happy; she will hate that."

"But we can't either of us be happy when he is like this."

Naturally Gerald Streatfield could never think of any other reason why Manuella should not be completely happy. He pressed the question, but she refused em-

phatically to write the appeal that could only bring humiliation. Yet the opera *must* be heard; of that they were both agreed. It was impossible to speak to Harston, and his absences were getting more prolonged. Once he was away two days and a night, and when he returned, it was obvious he had been all that time without food or sleep. The idea of suicide was hanging about the outskirts of their mind, waiting for entrance. There were times when they could scarcely speak of him to each other, the alteration in him was so dreadful. He seemed to shrink from them, from their sympathetic eyes; it was obvious he could not bear sympathy. His sensitiveness was so inflamed that even their presence in the room hurt. He to be pitied! He to need sympathy! Migotti! The mood might have passed, it was too painful, perhaps too unreasonable, to have lasted.

"If only I had money of my own I would take a theatre and mount the opera. I know it has only to be heard. It is killing him to think his music must lie dead, inarticulate. I know how he feels, for he told me. Like a father with a child, lovely, exquisite, but blind and deaf and dumb. That is exactly how he feels. I have written down his own words. . . ."

"We must do something."

Later on that evening, when Harston was in the room, but sitting apart from them, silent, Gerald said it again:

"If only I had money of my own!"

Harston was apparently not listening, but to their surprise he said irritably:

"What use would it be if you had all the money in the world? You could not *make* them produce *The Chariot Queen.*"

"I would take a theatre and produce it myself," Gerald answered boldly.

"But why not? Why not?"

Harston sprang excitedly to his feet.

"Because I haven't the money. I only wish I had."

"But *I* have, *I* have. Is it, then, only a question of

money? But why did not you, why did not you or Manuella say so before?"

He was all excitement and rapid interrogation. There was question and quick answer, Gerald taking fire from him.

None of the three of them was a practical person, although Manuella had learnt to keep house. The scheme seemed to come to life fully grown. Why should not Harston Migotti produce his own opera in his own way—take a theatre and reconstruct it, engage his artists, his orchestra, and be his own conductor and manager? Before they realized to what they were committed, it had become not only possible but inevitable. It is what they ought to have done from the first. Migotti himself would make his own reputation, be dependent on no man's favour. He swung back to an almost incredible elation, and would neither hear of difficulties nor admit the word doubt. Once again he became imperiously confident.

It appeared that the income upon which Manuella and her husband lived was derived from a capital of between five and six thousand pounds. The sum had been invested to provide for his education, but when he came of age a lawyer had written to him that now the capital was his own. There had been an interview when papers of release were signed. The lawyer had spoken of the satisfactory investments, and advised that if Mr. Migotti had no immediate need of the money that they should be left undisturbed. He had had no use for the money then, but now! It became wonderful all at once, all their lives became wonderful, for Harston was himself again and Gerald his ecstatic henchman. Of course he would himself produce his opera, then they would see what they would see. . . . It was really a mad scheme and carried out on a mad scale.

The investments were all sold out; that was, of course, the first thing to do.

Manuella, to whom it did occur that they had no means of livelihood if the enterprise failed, could not suggest such a thought to Harston in his present mood. She

ventured a word to Gerald, but Gerald asked her in astonishment how could the enterprise fail? Was it possible that the greatest musical work of the day, the first wholly English opera, written and composed by a tone-poet, greater than Richard Wagner, who would conduct all the rehearsals, arrange all the scenery, engage all the artists, fail of a great, of a commanding success? Besides, as Gerald pointed out enthusiastically, Harston was not one to care for luxury; he had slept as well on his old dust-bed as he did now on the new spring mattress, eaten at restaurants, and worn old clothes. . . . Manuella flushing, but keeping silence in her growing self-discipline, realized how little she had done for him. Certainly, now she would not stand in his way.

In these first days after the great decision, there seemed no drawbacks to face, no obstacles to overcome. None of the difficulties of the enterprise appeared at once. The investments realized six thousand pounds; with that it was easy to take a theatre. Once the Palestrina was secured, paragraphs began to appear; soon Harston was overwhelmed with offers of help, offers that in the end showed that everybody wished to help themselves to a share of the six thousand pounds. All these volunteer assistants were agreed in acknowledging Harston Migotti's genius and admiring his opera, even before hearing it.

The ease with which Harston Migotti was allowed to spend his six thousand pounds was only exceeded by the difficulty he found in getting value for it. Once the theatre was taken, all the careful estimates he and Gerald had made went by the board. Everyone realized they were dealing with amateurs, and extras mounted accordingly. The amount allowed for rent and lighting, dresses and scenery, proved elastic, and the never-ending rehearsals had all to be paid for. All the incredible difficulties were doubled and redoubled by the English libretto.

Singers of all nations were engaged, tried and discarded, and had to be compensated. Paliset and Callot returned their parts after having accepted them; they

could neither learn their words nor sing the music. Havelock Green and Trestle were unknown, and merited their obscurity, but before they were engaged so many people had been approached that the mere list of their names reads like a *Who's Who* of the operatic stage.

Harston Migotti set himself the task of giving an adequate representation of a scheme that in its first intention was to have outrivalled anything as yet seen outside Bayreuth, with a complete ignorance of the task confronting him. The production of grand opera is an enterprise so little like any other, that a lifetime is necessary as an education for its accomplishment.

Before he started he was beaten by the unforeseen. But, then, he foresaw nothing; neither the unfitness of the acoustics of the house for the large orchestra, and the space needed, nor the impossibility of finding English singers. The inevitable had to happen. This, too, is an old story now, but the result could never have been in doubt.

The climax came when, less than a week before the first night, Madame Stella Lely developed an operatic sore throat, and threw up the title rôle. It was too late to find a prima-donna. O'Neill and John Otterstein would release no one from her contract. Grand opera voices were not to be found on concert platforms, in musical comedy companies, in schools of music. Or, if they were to be found, there was no time to look for them. Manuella, at least, knew every note of the music, and the composer's intention. It was, of course, a counsel of despair, but just one week before the first night Manuella was told that the only way to help her husband, to save the opera, was for her to create the part of "Boadicea." Once she had dreamed of becoming a great singer; now she knew her inadequacy and pleaded, *how* she pleaded! But what was to be done?

"You have sung it over and over again," Gerald argued when he was called into council. "For God's sake don't make objections. Just do the best you can. I

don't know what will happen if you fail us. We have tried everybody."

Gerald was distracted; nothing but Harston's indomitable belief in himself and the opera could have carried them through to a performance.

"It will not stand or fall by the title rôle," he told his wife consolingly. "It is not you, but my music, they will come to hear."

"Of course I will do the best I can," she promised Harston.

"I shall spoil the opera, you know it as well as I," she told Gerald.

"Nothing can spoil the opera. As for this production. . . ."

But he would not admit that he knew nothing but fiasco was before them.

She rehearsed with and without the orchestra, daily, hourly, all that short week; took hasty lessons in stage deportment and diction, threw herself into the part with a most passionate abandonment. She had a beautiful voice and a fine ear, and was not without dramatic talent. But not all the intensity of her desire and her Sisyphian labours could disguise the fact that the task she undertook was beyond her. Perhaps she would have acquitted herself better if Harston had been able to conceal this from her. But all he said was that she was not worse than many of the others, and that, however it was sung, the Press and public, Mr. O'Neill and Otterstein would know how fine the music was, how original and characteristic.

CHAPTER XVII

THE last week passed with incredible swiftness. Disputes, recriminations, exhausting, overwhelming work, filled its difficult hours. Manuella was little less capable at the end than she had been at the beginning, although she had had much help from kind women and men in the new profession she was adventuring.

The Chariot Queen was being produced by Harston Migotti at his own theatre, under his own bâton, but with a travesty of all his ideas and projects in regard to scenery and singers.

He had reduced and further reduced his ambitions, narrowed down his ideas that still remained bigger than anyone else's, accepted, almost without complaint, the abandonment of first one and then another of his effects. The whole thing was so different from the dimensions of his intention, so belittled and shorn, that the tragedy of the first night hardly affected him.

The Chariot Queen is now part of our national musical wealth, and acknowledged to be all, and more than, the young composer claimed for it. In it we see the birth of a nation, hear the break of the waves against our shores, the coming of galleys, the murmur of stream and woodland, the tramplings and battling of armies, and always in palpitating throbs the awakening heart of a people.

The libretto has an epic nobility, the music is vital, with the universal appeal of enduring art; we all know

this now. But the conception was on too great a scale, and all the execution fell below it. The period of the story was too remote for general sympathy, the love-interest rude and primitive, the wild scenery almost repellent in its ruggedness. On the first night of the production in London, on the stage of the Palestrina, under amateur management, with the wife of the composer in the title rôle, the opera had no chance at all of a fair judgment. The taint of amateurism was over everything; it is cruel and unnecessary to go into detail. Uninstructed or inefficient workmen manœuvred the scenery; the waves were canvas on the wood that rocked them, the Reinhardt lighting, as by this time it had come to be called, was another name for the gloom on the stage that spread quickly to the coughing restless house. The action was obscured by delays; the orchestra was confounded and the choruses confused by the stage carpenters. Manuella's long hair was black, and though she was in great beauty, and rose at times to the occasion, she was never Boadicea, and the rage of prophecy was only in her flushed cheeks and glorious anguished eyes; it was never in her inadequate voice and delivery. Her performance would have damned any opera.

The greater part of the audience left before the end of the second act. Those that remained made up for the discourtesy of the others by exercising their sense of humour. Many funny things were said in the stalls, and some from the gallery were shouted to the stage.

Fiasco; hopeless, unmistakable, incontrovertible, was the verdict of the final stragglers in the vestibule; it was patent to the shrugging critics. The sense of it had chilled the final numbers, and taken the heart out of the singers. Manuella's last song was received with cat-calls. At the end there was hissing. The orchestra stood to their guns like men, and the grand *finale* under the bâton of the young composer swelled to its overwhelming magnificence. He turned to face the house, bâton still in hand, that fine head of his erect, his cheeks flushed. He would have spoken, but they drowned

him with hisses and gallery wit, and so continued until the lights were lowered.

The notices in the morning papers proved that the Press—there is no use disguising it—failed utterly in realizing what they had seen and heard. The best known of our critics contented himself by writing that the very greatness of the conception was an argument against its execution. Having delivered himself of this epigram, he wrote his article up to it, and, having mislaid the libretto and forgotten what it was that pleased him in the music, he generalized about the growing tendency to patriotism on the stage, and wound up a really admirable essay with an allusion to *Drake* and *An Englishman's Home.*

The gentleman who wrote for *The Thunderer,* having left before the second act, dismissed the whole entertainment as "obviously the work of a rich and ambitious amateur who has much to learn but more to forget." "Everything that is not reminiscent is forcibly feeble. The beautiful unknown prima-donna was more like a schoolgirl shouting defiance at her governess than Boadicea rebuking the Romans."

Others fashioned their phrases merely to entertain; the following was characteristic of these efforts:

"The new and youthful aspirant to musical honours breaks into the ring—the close opera ring—on gaily caparisoned steed, his visor down, tilting with his lance—or bâton. A very noble knight in sooth, and one to whom we owe a certain amount of gratitude for having introduced us to a new Queen of Beauty, without a voice, however, or, we should say, any experience of the stage. He throws down the gage to the recognized masters of harmony, but that, too, is a mere detail. He has certainly added to the gaiety of Nations. The shouts of laughter or derision. . . ."

A different note was struck in the columns of *The Daily Satirist:*

"Until last night the name of Harston Migotti was unknown. It will be interesting, although perhaps not difficult, to find the motive actuating the anonymity of

the gentleman who has taken a theatre, written a poem (*sic*), composed music, mounted scenery, and called his entertainment 'Grand Opera!' We were told last night that the whole production was merely a vehicle, a very cumbrous and ridiculous equipage, for foisting upon the public a very beautiful young woman who has every qualification for the stage except that she can neither sing nor act. If this is the case, there is something to be said in favour of a new form of philanthropy. It is more original than endowing public libraries, for a greater number of people have been given employment. . . ."

The remainder of the article consisted of a well-written essay on amateurism in art.

The above are fair specimens from the great dailies. No one took the opera seriously, except a newcomer to journalism on the staff of the *Evening Intelligence,* who wrote that it was the noblest music that had been heard in England for many a long year, and for that reason would probably have to wait half a century for recognition. He went on to say that he understood Mr. Migotti claimed to be an Englishman, and aimed at producing an English National Music. But he must "find a better exponent than the beautiful young girl who made such a deplorable attempt last night in the part of Boadicea."

Nearly all the papers spoke of the beauty of the young and unknown prima-donna. Manuella found herself insulted by these notices, bedewed them with angry and indignant tears.

She had not wanted to sing, or to act, knowing herself incapable of either. They had made her do it, and she had wrecked everything. She was not sorry, she was angry, furious. But she was also wretched. She was not, and never would be in any sense of the word, a "public woman," having the instincts neither of the actress nor of the singer, aspiring neither to fame nor notoriety. She had sung because there was no one else, because Gerald urged it. She could see that Harston resented her failure. He would scarcely look at her when

they went home. And the next morning was worse. On the second night there were not eighty people in the house. The overture was applauded, and so were several of the choruses. But Manuella was almost without a voice, and let down every scene in which she appeared.

"If we can only hold on," Gerald said hopefully. That seemed the entire question with him. But all that Manuella cared about was that she should be released from her hateful and intolerable task. She loved justice passionately, and Harston was being unjust to her; seeming to confound her with his critics, to look upon her as the principal factor in his great disappointment. She tried to argue it with him, but he was beyond argument.

They were not able to "hold on." At the end of the week it became obvious to everyone that they must close the theatre. All the hastily-engaged incapables —chorus-master, stage-manager, acting manager, Press agents, and the rest of them, were clamorous to prove that they were not responsible for the failure, and to put the blame on some one else. To apportion the blame seemed the only objective, and the prima-donna was the natural scapegoat.

But it was only Harston's attitude and the injustice of it that angered her. She had not wanted to sing.

But with all her anger, she could not withhold first her sympathy for him, and then her admiration. His whole life had centred on the opera; for two years it had never been out of his mind, and he had worked incessantly. Now it was damned by Press and public, and he himself was flouted, contemptuously dismissed in a paragraph, treated as of no account. It did not alter his attitude nor shake his confidence. He was as certain of himself to-day as he was yesterday.

"They will know some day," he said, and shrugged his shoulders. "Notwithstanding what they say, it is the great English opera."

The week after the theatre was compulsorily closed he seemed to become calm—calm all at once—and that

light in his eyes shone more brightly than ever. Already he was at work again. Only Manuella he could not forgive. At least, that is how it appeared to her. Once when he came in and found her at the piano he put his hands to his ears.

"Oh! don't sing," he said, "for God's sake don't sing. Cook; it is far better. Make omelettes, then if you break eggs no harm is done."

She was his wife, of course, but he could not get over the way she had sung his music. He could not listen to her any more; she must never sing again; he closed his ears to her voice that had served him so ill.

She was so altered and disciplined that she did not even cry out at the cruelty of it; nor reproach him that he had forced her to make the attempt.

It was comparatively easy to close the theatre, and dismiss the company; the six thousand pounds had been lost. By various strokes of luck they even managed to emerge solvent. The lessor took back the theatre; the principal artists found engagements and cancelled their contracts. There was real sympathy and goodwill shown by the world behind the scenes. Every musician knew what neither Press nor public had discovered. As for the women and girls, to the last super, they proclaimed themselves in love with the composer.

After the theatre was closed, and all the business connected with it at an end, the future had to be faced. Gerald Streatfield had been useful, invaluable, sparing Harston all possible detail. But he could not spare him the knowledge that out of six thousand pounds there was less than forty pounds left, and there was nothing coming in to replace the everything that had gone out.

Harston took the news characteristically. The theatre had been closed a month before the accounts were all in and the completeness of the disaster was disclosed. It seemed as if he had forgotten all the circumstances, or excluded them from his mind.

"It was the singers, principally the singers," he said, as if the financial aspect did not exist, and Gerald's

announcement that he was ruined was of no account. "I know now. I wrote my libretto in English, that is the reason, and in English there was no artist to sing it. In my new libretto I am now writing——"

"You are really writing again—have started another libretto? By Jove!"

"But why not?" He was quite calm. "Why not?" He shrugged his shoulders at their evident surprise, but he obviously enjoyed it. "Did you think that was the end? *The Chariot Queen* the end? Why, great God! it is only the beginning!"

To both Gerald Streatfield, filled with mundane things, and to Manuella, hurt and angry with him, but not unfair, it was wonderful that he ignored all that had happened, and was at work again on a new opera.

"This time I shall write my libretto in Italian. Italian, English, German, they are all my native tongues, but my true inspiration is English. I am writing of Queen Cartismandua, the great queen who gave her enemy to Rome."

He refused to talk of what was going to happen now no money was coming in; all he would discuss was the new opera.

"Manuella must manage," he said vaguely. "There will be enough, there will surely be enough. I need so little. Listen!" His eyes were alight. Manuella came in from the cookery to which he had relegated her, and stood listening.

"At first, when my music was murdered and no one could sing, I was very angry. I was angry with Manuella; poor Manuella, who cannot help it because she can only cook. For days and days since the theatre was closed I heard nothing. Then a riot of music began again, and I saw, I saw all the mistakes that I had made. Of course, the opera is great; but this one will be greater, and the libretto must be in Italian. . . ."

He was no less confident. Boadicea was too rude a figure, the story too concrete. It was of humanity he had written, coarse and violent, even the woodland songs

and twilight had been coloured by war and bloody battles, by clash of arms. He had heard and written the birth pangs of a mighty nation. This new work would be vastly different; he poured it all out, nothing else interested him. There would be one act in England, the land of uncleared forest, the land of promise those first Romans saw before their own Neronian legionaries overran it. Then they would see the heavy corn fleets arriving from the granaries of the north, pastures almost too deep and rich for cattle, and hills covered with innumerable flocks of sheep, their bodies weighed down with wool; the harvest of amber from the generous sea; all this they should see and hear.

Gerald listened open-mouthed. He had brought him the tale of ruin, and his only answer was the new libretto.

"I am glad it is over; that *Chariot Queen;* I want to get out of my ears the crash of arms, the noise of war and lamentation. In this I have a dance of elves in moonlight, a chorus of birds in sunshine, a skylark poised, black against a grey sky. Oh! but I have beautiful things. Listen!" He took his place at the piano.

Manuella rested her tray quietly on the table. Neither she nor Gerald moved whilst he played his first inspiration of the "Dances of the Elves," that delicate mysterious aria now known as "The Grass Ring." When he swung round on the piano stool he was as he had been three months ago. Failure had neither daunted nor changed him.

"So! it is good—eh?"

The music was more than good, and Gerald went into ecstasies. Manuella, too, joined in the praise, but she could see that her words were of less importance.

Now he told them how the story would unfold, of Cartismandua and the rebellious Venusias, of the idyll with her armour-bearer not unlike that of Lancelot and Guinevere, but more radiant and impelling. He talked far into the morning; he even played again.

He gave no thought to the state of their affairs. Three o'clock struck before they went to bed. Gerald had said

at least thirty times that he was the greatest musical genius of the century, and he had agreed. They went to bed at three, with never a word of finance or failure.

So acutely he heard, but never the pulsing note in the heart of the girl who presently lay at his side. He was a genius; but she needed a husband—a human husband to whom she could speak of the trouble that was coming to her. She cried by his side and he heard nothing. It was from loneliness she cried, as widows cry in the night. To someone she must tell her trouble, and there was no one. She had had the strength to keep her secret until after *The Chariot Queen* was produced. Then, then she thought she would tell him. Now *The Chariot Queen* was finished, but everything was to happen again with *Cartismandua*. She could not tell him; he would not listen. . . . She cried in her loneliness whilst he slept by her side, dreaming of romance and chivalry.

CHAPTER XVIII

EVERYTHING was the same, and yet everything had changed. Manuella was *enciente* with her first child—an elemental difference. And Harston was no longer in love with her, although perhaps unaware of it. She could not help him in his work. He said quite frankly that he could not bear to hear her sing. Also they had now no income upon which to draw. Little as she cared for money, hardly less than he, she knew it was necessary now, and presently would be more necessary.

Gerald tried to keep up her courage, but to him, as to everyone who came to the house, Harston was the leading figure; what he would do next was the great topic. There was no secret about *Cartismandua.* Gerald said:

"*The Chariot Queen* was great, but this will be greater still. He is writing now, not composing; but the things he has played me! My heavens! they are incomparable; this time it is a masterpiece! Nothing else matters. You feel that, too, don't you? Of course, the fault was not yours *The Chariot Queen* was ruined. But you will admit that, in the room, here, you sang differently?"

By now Gerald, too, seemed to think she was responsible for the failure of the opera.

"You won't let anything interfere with the work, will you? Not pride, nor anything like that. He must be undisturbed. When I told him all the money was lost

he only said it was of no consequence. He is wonderful, really wonderful. I can manage something, you know; you and he are welcome to anything I have. It isn't much, but it may help."

"Nothing is of consequence but that he should be undisturbed," she repeated bitterly, and he took her words literally.

"Of course, that is the thing—the only thing."

Gerald saw only Harston. She was not to stand with her mere material needs between the poet and his inspiration, the musician and his moods. She was to minister to his physical needs, and be proud of her privilege. She had not yet told her husband how it was with her. Absorbed as he was in the beautiful idyll of *Cartismandua* and her armour-bearer, no one could expect him to be interested in his wife's health. What was to be done when the money in the bank was exhausted Manuella did not know. She could take money from Gerald Streatfield for Harston's needs, but not for her own; her cheeks flushed at the thought. Yet there were many things she must have . . . baby clothes, for instance. Now, for the first time, her dependence weighed upon her. All day long Harston wrote or played. With her heart full, with a sense of disaster impending and complete, she went about her household work, holding and hiding her secret. She had tried to make up, in the sacrifices of her married life, for all the errors of her impetuous girlhood. But now, for the moment, she was again in rebellion. She did not know what she could do; she had no woman friend to whom to turn; she had only these two men, to whom, as she told herself often, she was now only an encumbrance. The prospect of a child in these rooms, a crying child, seemed impossible. She was herself hardly allowed to move when he worked, the slightest sound disturbed him. And then she would be ill. . . . Over and over again the question turned in her mind: what should she do? She was so utterly inexperienced, so pitiably young. But she was strong. She hung on to the thought of her strength. "I am going to get through somehow. I ran

away with him without loving him, only because I was out of temper. It is I, not he, must suffer."

Every week it became more difficult to tell him, because each day the new opera became more engrossing. He lived in a world of his own; often those vivid eyes of his looked past her, as if he never saw her at all. That she was here, toiling, and about to bear a child, would be for him a fact infinitely small and unimportant compared with his visions.

In the end, but not before her pregnancy was far advanced, she told Gerald Streatfield. "He will put it in Harston's biography," she told herself bitterly, "but he may be able to advise me what to do."

"You know I am going to have a baby." There was no use trying to find another way of saying it.

"I was afraid it was so. What does he say about it?"

"I haven't told him."

"No! Of course! We must keep it from him as long as possible. He ought not to hear, you know, he really ought to hear nothing, until his libretto, at least, is finished. Can it be managed? That is the question. He tells me he does not write as easily in Italian as in English or German. He works hard, night and day; what a man he is! But, I say, what are you going to do? I suppose you'll have to go away. He told me that at the rate he is going he ought to finish by Christmas. Wagner wrote *The Flying Dutchman* in seven weeks. It would be an awful pity for anything to interrupt him."

"I shan't interrupt him," she said sullenly.

"No! I know, you are simply ripping to him."

Nevertheless, although he thought her of so little account, Gerald's practical mind was very useful. He found a nursing home for her, and even got over the money difficulties.

"Haven't you got any jewellery, anything you can pawn?"

Such a solution had never occurred to Manuella, but, once Gerald suggested it, everything became easy. She

had a small string of pearls given to her by her father when she was still at school. She had not brought away the wedding present of jewellery, or any of the things Lord Lyssons had given her, but she wore always this little string of pearls. Gerald was able to borrow nearly two hundred pounds on them, which seemed an inexhaustible fortune. She was very inexperienced and grateful. Later, they agreed that Gerald should tell Harston of what was going to happen.

"I can tell him casually. You'll see he'll take little notice of it."

"What is that of which I shall not take any notice?"

Harston came in whilst they were speaking, looking from one to another, sure, of course, that they were discussing him, some flaw or beauty they had discovered in what he had played or read to them.

"Nothing of importance," Gerald answered cheerfully, proud of his presence of mind, "nothing to interfere."

"Not the chorus?"

"No, no! certainly not the chorus. I am off; see you later, perhaps."

But when Gerald had gone, thinking thus to avoid the question, and put off the moment when it would be necessary to tell him of the coming trouble, Harston repeated the question and pressed it.

"If it is not the chorus, it must be the quintette. Tell me," he insisted.

This was no case of whispering in his ear, nestling in his arms, crying on his shoulder; he was not that sort of husband.

"It is nothing to do with the opera. It is only that I am going to have a child," she blurted out.

"A child! You are going to have a child?"

He seemed quite stupefied and stared at her, as if it were some action she had taken against him, something in which he had had no part.

"But it is impossible!" And then, after a pause, recollecting himself, and as if in apology: "But what a trouble, what an inconvenience! Here!" he looked

around. "And before the opera is finished?" He was quite dismayed.

"*You* won't see or hear anything!" She was almost fierce because she would not show she was hurt. "I have arranged to go away. I was not going to tell you at all. As Gerald says, it is not of any importance. You need not be inconvenienced. He is getting a charwoman. You won't miss me if I am away for a few weeks, unless—unless the omelettes are burnt."

She was ashamed of her quick tears. She had the fears of her inexperience, and thought that perhaps she would never come back. But he would not miss her, unless the charwoman cooked less well than she.

He was not a monster, only a genius. He said he should miss her all the time, and that it was dreadful for her, worse than for him. He even tried to comfort her by saying cheerfully that she would be back before *Cartismandua* was finished.

"You must not worry about leaving me alone. In a way I think it is good; I work better if I am quite alone."

When he was so kind as to say this she cried more, but in her own room, where he could not see her. The next few days he hardly wrote at all, but bewailed the misfortune, kissing her, and saying with some feeling that, of course, she could not help it, it was not her fault. But that for which she ached he never gave her—an understanding word. "*Our baby.*" If he had only said that, it would have been enough. But he wondered instead what they should do with it, and if he ought not to go away instead of her.

"I might go over to Darmstadt, to Germany, and work; but I have so many friends there. . . ."

She told him hastily that all the arrangements were now made.

"Well, it is true, you know, that I am better here. These rooms are so quiet. . . ."

Afterwards he said they had better leave off talking about it, for the anxiety prevented him working. He was naturally of a sympathetic nature, so he assured her,

and he was uncomfortable in thinking that she must leave them.

But things were little better when she was actually gone. Fitzroy Square was close by, and he felt it his duty to visit her, to visit her even daily, and this was a great interruption. She could not persuade him to stay away. He knew what was expected of a husband and future father; he had learnt that in Germany.

Every time he came to see her he said it was a pity it had happened before *Cartismandua* was finished, and wondered what they would do with a child in those two rooms.

Her courage needed bracing in that week of waiting. She had perhaps come into the Home too early, or perhaps she had waited too long for attentive nursing. She felt ill and worse than lonely. Hour after hour she sat by herself in the room in that inexpensive maternity home; alone with the bare walls, uncurtained windows, uncarpeted floors, and the fear of what was before her! There was no joy in the prospect. It must not trouble Harston; Harston must never hear an infant's cry. Sometimes she hoped it would not live, and these were her worst times. The nurse told her it was bad for her to cry, and she never cried except when she was alone. She wished Harston did not think it his duty to come every day. His visits gave her no pleasure. Whilst he was playing the affectionate husband she saw, behind the thin mask of his solicitude, the artist divorced from his art, in all the real torment of arrested travail. He was quite unable to conceal from her that she had become a burden to him. Long afterwards Gerald told her confidentially:

"He said there was no room for a minor third in the harmony of your lives."

But the harmony had never been music. Her studies were as if from a beginner's exercise-book.

When the waiting time was over, the long lonely hours, the nights of wakefulness and tears had the natural effect. She was very ill, so ill that for a day and a night her life hung on a thread. When Harston came—and she

fought long against his being sent for—he was to hear that a son had been born to him. In the nursing home no one showed tact in dealing with him. They treated him as if he were an ordinary man, and he fell to pieces under the test. It was a week before he came again. And after that, Manuella, her mind clear, although her body was so weak, begged him to stay away. He brought her nothing but the knowledge that he suffered in coming; that she and the child were no essential part of his life. He talked of nothing but the opera.

She could not wait for her convalescence, the wailing baby jarred her overwrought nerves. As yet, at least, it brought no message to her. Long before her strength returned she was worrying about ways and means, thinking how she should manage. In four weeks she was walking about the room. In five she surprised Gerald by her unexpected return to Bedford Square.

"But how good it is to see you here!"

Gerald's welcome, at least, was spontaneous and hearty, as he met her on the staircase.

"He is out; I suppose he didn't know you were coming. He is awfully restless and *distrait*—off his food, too. It is a good thing you are back; it doesn't seem to be going well with the work; I think he has put it aside for the moment. There have been one or two inquiries about *The Chariot Queen*. He talks of rescoring part of it. I'm glad you are back."

"I suppose he hasn't thought of any way of making money?"

"You can't harness Pegasus. . . ."

Upstairs she found disheartening things that more experienced housekeepers might have expected—dirty pots and pans, broken crockery, burnt saucepans, the handiwork of the charwoman Gerald had engaged from the theatre.

"But what I do say, ma'am, is the music your husband makes of an evening is that lovely I hain't got the 'eart to clean up. I just sets and listens to it, me apron over me 'ead. . . ."

She was specious, dishonest, drunken. When Manuella had got rid of her volubility and excuses, depressed in the undusted sitting-room, it seemed that this life she had prepared for herself was unbearable, too hard for her, not worth living.

"She has let everything go to ruin"—there was even passion in her plaint over her household gods. Gerald, when he came up in the evening, had difficulty in consoling her. Secretly he thought she was a little hard on Mrs. Mortimer.

"But you'll soon have everything to rights again, don't get the hump. Even if he doesn't say anything, he'll be glad you are back."

Harston was glad, and even said so. Yet all that evening she did not seem able to shake off her depression. It was, of course, impossible to have a wailing infant here with them; she had no feeling for it, and could think of it quite detachedly. The matron of the home had found a kind woman to mother it. It was so small; no one could be unkind to it.

Gerald asked her why she was depressed. Harston played to her nearly all the evening. The baby had no place, not even in her heart. So she thought, and that all her duty was to the man to whom she had run recklessly, because her stepmother angered her.

The next day and the next were occupied in restoring order to her little domain; there was no time for fretting.

It cost money to replace necessities. She found herself thinking constantly of money. "I am growing like father," she said to Gerald.

"Oh, no; don't say that!"

"But what are we to do? There is nothing coming in, and you say I mustn't speak about it to him. What about the rent?"

"I've got enough for that."

"We can't live on you. I am not going to live on you."

"He is getting on ever so much better now; your

affair put him back months, positively months. We don't know what we have lost. It would be simply awful to pull him up again over a few pounds. You know in a way he is altered, there is an exquisite humility. He doesn't say now: 'I am Migotti, I have achieved.' He says: 'I am Migotti, I will achieve.' One day, when you have time, I wish you would look through my notebook; you will be surprised."

"He could make all we want by playing accompaniments."

"You know you don't mean it."

"I mean we can't live on nothing."

"I never thought of you as mercenary."

"Well, you can now if you like." She was paying the woman eighteen shillings a week to care for her baby. The seven weeks in the nursing home had cost a fortune.

The sense of emptiness, unfulfilment, depression persisted. But Harston was working well; inspiration was flowing back to him. He said once:

"You bring me good fortune. Since you are back all goes better."

Since he worked better because she was here, she was at least keeping her marriage vows—those vows made after she had had Lord Lyssons' letter. How could it be possible she missed that wailing baby? Neither the baby nor the want of money must be allowed to impede Harston. Gerald said she had to keep the gyves from his spirits, free him, take all burdens on herself, and let him soar.

He was not yet soaring, but uplifted, making flights, short, spasmodic, that carried him a little way, and were preliminary to his disappearance in the empyrean. The libretto and the music were progressing together, but not quickly. He had to be alone now; he could not even bear her in the room with him. He may have felt he lacked something as a companion, as a husband. He made a sort of apology. Gerald wrote down the exact words; it was fortunate he was in the room.

"When I am alone the musical fibres within me vibrate,

heterogeneous sounds form themselves into chords, and it is then I hear the melody which reveals my inner self to me. My heart in loud beats marks the impetuous rhythms; I become excited, overwhelmed. Afterwards, before it is gone, I must write, play; sometimes tears gush out of my eyes as I write or play. . . ."

They could not talk of money to him after that. Manuella agreed with Gerald that it would be impossible.

Harston really lacked nothing. Manuella, women do these things often, went without new clothes, ate sparingly, eked out what little was left. Gerald paid the rent, and was grateful for the opportunity. He, too, was living for posterity, keeping his note-book faithfully.

"His time of privation. How I was privileged to pay the rent of two rooms in Bedford Square whilst the immortal work was in progress."

There came a day when she drew the last ten pounds out of the bank. What was going to happen when that was gone she did not know. This was the day the woman who had charge of the baby brought it to the flat. She was a married woman, with a husband out of work, and he had had an offer from an emigration agency. That was why she brought the child back to its mother. He was now nearly four months old.

"He's a good baby, ma'am. I will say that for him, although he was puny enough when I took him from you. Such eyes he's got on him too; you wait till he opens them. I'd keep him myself now, ma'am, if I was you, if you'll excuse me saying so. It don't seem natural for you to be giving him up. You never can tell with these women that take children to nurse. I shouldn't like to think of him neglected nor ill-treated. Feel his weight, ma'am; he's doubled since I had him."

She gave the child to Manuella.

He seemed satisfied to go to her, and smiled into her face—smiled and gurgled. Quite a pang seized her, a pang of tenderness; this was the birth of mother-love. She stooped over him and kissed him, his little cheeks were soft.

"How small he is! Can't he do anything for himself?"

The surprise of her tenderness made her speech incoherent. "He's like my brother Bertie used to be. Aren't his arms fat?" She kissed them too, every moment she held the child it became more certain that it belonged in her arms. She held it closer, her heart throbbing as the warmth of the little body stole through her. Again she put her face down . . . miracle of miracles, he had fallen asleep in her arms!

"You'll keep him yourself, ma'am?"

"Shall I know what to do for him?" The hesitation was artificial. She knew she would not relinquish him again.

"The Lord sends the knowledge when he sends the baby. You'll do well enough. You'd have done all right from the first if they'd have let you. I never believe these stories doctors and nurses tell you about not being able to nurse a child yourself. If you'd have kept him at the breast he'd have sucked and sucked and brought the milk along, bless him! That stuff they give him in the Home only chilled his blessed little stomach. I put him on warm barley-water till I freed him of it. Now he gets his milk with the barley-water—no foods, no artificial messes. An' you likes your bottle, don't you, my beauty!"

Manuella had learnt none of this talk, but the words were like a native tongue to her. And all the time the baby slept in her arms. She was told what it was went into his bottle; how wonderful to think she would cook for him! The woman showed her how to make the food, and stayed a long time talking. When the baby awoke and cried, Manuella put the teat to its mouth, whispered to herself that she was his "mother," his "mammy," and was awed. The baby sucked greedily and fell asleep, sucked spasmodically in its sleep, and slept again. His eyes seemed to look at her, and then they half closed. The warmth in her arms was sweet to her, a splendid present that had been brought her unexpectedly. All the time she was being told how to care for it.

"You give a few drops of dill-water if he cries as if he's got a pain."

"Dill-water?"

"Or peppermint. And don't you feed him too often; it's regular as does it."

"How often?"

"Every three hours."

"Always the same thing?"

"More milk and less barley-water as he gets on. He won't give you no trouble. I've never nursed a better baby, once I got him right. You're a born mother; anyone can see that by the way you hold him. Lovey, dovey! Look at 'im now! The beauty! Keep him snuggling up; that's what they want most, lovin' of them. You'll find out all about him, he'll almost tell you himself."

Manuella paid her off presently, gave her a present she could ill afford, and thanked her for all she had done. Harston might come in at any moment; Gerald, too. She had to get supper ready. She was reluctant to put the child down, but eventually she laid it on the bed. She felt the warmth of its body through all her own body whilst she grilled the steak and fried the potatoes. More than once she went from the stove to the bedroom, light-footed, to see what lay there. It still slept, and once smiled as if in a happy dream. Then she kissed it again. She knew she would be able to care for him. She had learnt more difficult things since she had run away with Harston Migotti.

When Gerald came upstairs, and Harston came in, she gave them their supper. Harston was in good spirits, full of a wonderful lyric. After supper he meant to add a final polish; he would not read it to them; perhaps he would play the music.

"This story is coming to me quite differently from *The Chariot Queen.* The melodies and harmonies are born with the words; they seem to come together, although the words are sometimes faint. But you shall hear."

All the evening he played, and she went backwards and forwards to the bedroom, extraordinarily happy. There was no change in their circumstances; only a ten-pound note was between themselves and want, but anxiety and trouble seemed to have been lifted from her.

Harston played himself into such good humour, Gerald was so extravagantly laudatory, that she took her courage in both hands and told them what had happened.

"Come now and see him. He hasn't disturbed you, has he? I'm sure he never will. . . ."

"But this isn't what they showed me!" Harston exclaimed at the sight of the plump and sleeping child.

They all laughed, even Harston himself.

"Of course, he has grown. I see. So this is my son!"

He watched it sleeping; Gerald read his mind more easily than Manuella, even now.

"You might write a *berceuse* for him," he suggested.

"Ought his finger to be in his mouth?" Harston asked.

And none of them knew if it were right or wrong; the community of their ignorance drew them together. Harston spoke of the Master and Siegfried.

"I have never thought about children—babies. It is wonderful that I should have a son, and that this should be he. What a quantity of hair he has, but so dark; he is not nearly as English as I." She had not imagined he would have been so much interested. "Are they musician's fingers?" He put his own, tentatively, on the little fist. And, behold, it opened, closing on the tentative fingers. The conquest was complete. There was no question about its staying with them.

When Harston went back to the piano, Manuella and Gerald stayed and talked in whispers.

"But if it cries when he is composing?"

"He won't cry if he is properly looked after," she said confidently.

"Trust you for that," Gerald answered.

If the worst came to the worst there was his own bedroom downstairs.

"You'll have to take it there. He might turn into a Siegfried Wagner, and spread his fame. I shouldn't be surprised. Anyway, it will be interesting to recall what he said, and how surprised he was that it had grown. It was less than an hour old when he first saw it. Good-night. Don't forget you can use my room! Listen! He has started the *berceuse* already. What a man!"

Their voices woke the child; it stirred in its sleep, and started to cry. She gathered it up in her arms quickly. More clearly than the cradle song Harston was essaying in the next room she heard the beat of the little heart against her own.

CHAPTER XIX

TEN pounds between themselves and penury—*ten pounds!* The first week after the baby came six pounds went. She would learn how to make clothes for him, but at present she had to buy them. He must be put into short clothes. She was so happy with her new responsibility that she could not stop to think of money. It was true she was a born mother, just as she was a born housewife. It was as if she had come through a great spiritual crisis. Now she knelt before her motherhood as a Christian convert at his first communion. And the baby throve, sucked its thumb, gurgled, smiled, and slept. She told Gerald it had an instinct about its father. If it had to cry, and the best of babies must cry sometimes, it cried when Harston was out, or sleeping so soundly that nothing woke him. She could slip out of bed, take the infant into the next room, hush its crying, all without Harston hearing. The first week flew like lightning; every minute was occupied. Harston went from his piano to his desk, from desk to piano, and his inspiration never flagged. An agent in Berlin wrote to ask about the rights in *The Chariot Queen,* and Gerald was already inquiring about a translator for the libretto. He said that the Germans were really music-lovers; Harston would come into his own in Germany, the Berlin Opera House was the very place. . . .

"For the great English National Opera?" Manuella asked. But she was really too happy that first week to be satirical.

A ring and two brooches remained to pawn. Schoolgirl trinkets both. It was fortunate that Sir Hubert Wagner's presents to his daughter had been of good quality. With another seventeen pounds in hand the immediate future could be faced.

She saved and spared, chiefly on her own food; working early and late. It was woman's work, not reckoned by any schedule, nor controlled by any union, without Thursday half-holidays, short days on Saturdays and Sundays off. Just woman's work, seven days in every week, fourteen hours a day, with an hour or two extra taken from the night, when she walked the floor with the baby, so that Harston should be undisturbed.

Harston was completely absorbed and content. He had found out something new about himself. Whenever he was not at his desk or at the piano he talked of his discovery. He needed sympathy, an audience, and, although since she had sung *The Chariot Queen* music so badly that he was no longer in love with her, he told her about it; because she was there.

"It is not what Wagner has done for operatic music in Germany that I must do for England; rather what Palestrina did for Church music in Italy. . . ."

He would dilate upon this theme for hours, upon pure melody and simplicity in harmonies, and more technical matters, whilst Manuella wondered if the milk had come to the boil, and whether she would have time to peel the potatoes.

Whenever he stopped to say: "You agree with me, of course?" she brought herself back from the potatoes or milk and answered: "I am sure you are quite right."

While he went on talking she sometimes fell to wondering how long that seventeen pounds would last. Baby ought to have a cot, a perambulator.

"If I am a poet, and there is no doubt that I am also

a musician, that is surely enough. I was wrong in elaborating the scenery. They would surely have heard more clearly, understood my meaning better, if there had been nothing for the eye. It is the ear, the ear and the intelligence, to which I make my appeal. . . ."

She herself ate little, she could easily go without meat altogether. Two pounds a week was ample for the housekeeping, even if baby had his meat-juice. A perambulator would cost three pounds, a cot thirty shillings. Four pounds ten shillings from seventeen pounds. . . .

"In Shakespeare's country I will write my opera for production as Shakespeare wrote his plays. A bare stage, a painted drop scene, no accessories. He had only his words. I have my words, too, and my music shall be my scenery, my accessories. . . ."

Gerald could argue with him, did argue with him, in the evenings, talking of Reinhardt and modern conditions. Manuella never argued, it was so much simpler to agree and go on thinking how long she could eke out her money.

Before Gerald's arguments had prevailed—and he always had the idea that Harston was not quite serious in his intention of producing grand opera without scenery—the rent was due again. Gerald's resources were not inexhaustible; his salary was at their command, but it was not a princely one. Those two old maids downstairs could not be left without the pittance upon which they lived. What was to be done?

Manuella's beauty now was the beauty of emaciation; the perfection of line was there, with the noble young head, fine brow, Greek nose, mouth a perfect bow, but thin and without colour. There was no colour in her face at all. Against the black coil of her hair it was like fine ivory; the curled lashes lay over eyes that no longer sparkled; they had a new depth, a new tenderness, but they were rarely uplifted, they dwelt on humble things, on things beneath them, on the baby on her knee, the saucepan in which she stirred his food. She was so thin that her clothes hung upon her. But she was only saving

money, not making it, for all her privation. What was to be done?

"I suppose you wouldn't apply to your people?" Gerald ventured.

"How can I?"

For herself it would be impossible. She would rather starve; she had already begun to think it was not so difficult to starve as people said, if you used yourself to it gradually. But there was baby, he ought to have a pelisse, a hat or bonnet.

"You have not heard anything more from Berlin?"

"I am getting the libretto translated."

"That will have to be paid for?"

"I can get it done very inexpensively; there is a man who works for our firm. . . ."

"Which means, I suppose, that you will pay for that, too. You would think it too dreadful to talk to Harston, to see if he would propose something? The season is coming on, he could play. . . ."

On that point Gerald was emphatic.

"Even if he would, he ought not to. You don't understand. No, don't be angry; I mean it is difficult for you to realize that, although *The Chariot Queen* was a failure, it has given him a certain position; his name is known. People, the right people, talk about him, ask what he is doing. The composer and librettist of *The Chariot Queen* cannot ask for an engagement as an accompanist! There are some things that can't be done. He *could* sell the score of *The Chariot Queen,* my own people would buy it, but only outright. He ought not to part with it like that; it isn't fair to him, or, in a way, to you, or to the boy. There is bound to come a time when everything he has written will be of value."

Manuella said desperately:

"But until then. . . ."

"Madame Liebius will be back in less than three weeks."

"And we are to sponge on her?"

"Your father has given nearly half a million to estab-

lish the Church in South Africa. It was in *The Daily Telegraph* yesterday. You know they are out there?"

"No, I don't. I am not interested in them. Besides, I don't read the papers, I haven't time. Is Bertie with them?"

"Your brother? I don't know. No! I think not. I've heard something about him lately, what was it? Oh! of course. . . ." He stopped short, glanced at her, reddened.

"You may as well tell me. Is he in London? What is he doing?"

"There is nothing very much to tell. It was while we were engaging the chorus at the Palestrina, arranging the ballet, that I heard of a girl he was, well, sort of engaged to. . . ."

Manuella, although she had been married for eighteen months and carried a baby in her arms, knew so little of the world that he could not put it differently. Perhaps he thought her more ignorant than she was, but, in any case, it was impossible for him to say that he understood her brother was keeping Coralie Standing. She pressed him, but he had little to add. She said slowly, presently:

"I might write to Bertie."

And, as she said it slowly, a flush of home-sickness came upon her for Bertie! How fond she had been of him! Bertie and she had been so much to each other. Their young days together came back to her; she put her face down to the baby's, he was seldom out of her arms; there were tears on her lashes, her voice was unsteady:

"I might write to Albert. I suppose he is at Stone House?"

"Do! I'll find out if he's living at home. Anyway, they are sure to know his address there."

She had had so much to think of that she had almost forgotten Albert; he would not let her starve. He may have disapproved of her marriage, taken sides with her parents; her letter to him addressed to Gairoch had come back unopened, but this, of course, was Lady Wagner's doing. But if he knew she was hungry. . . .

She dashed off a letter quickly. Gerald undertook it should be delivered.

"DEAR BERTIE,

"I wonder whether you would come and see me, or if you have been forbidden. I long so to see you; I've something to show you, something very like you. We were awfully fond of each other, weren't we? I'm in a sort of trouble, nothing to do with my marriage, and I haven't got anyone else to turn to. But don't come if you don't want. Tear this up if you like."

She found herself crying over the paper, thinking he might tear it up and not wish to see her. But she wouldn't be proud with him, not too proud. She added quickly:

"I do hope you'll write or come.

"Your ever-loving only sister,

"MANUELLA."

CHAPTER XX

THERE was good in Albert Wagner, a thin vein of gold in the coarse quartz; too unprofitable to work, but still gold. He could not have received his sister's letter before midday; at four o'clock he was with her.

"Why on earth didn't you write to me before? I've often wondered where you were. I don't believe I've ever been up so many stairs in my life. Why don't the people put in a lift, or did I miss it? How de do!" The last was to Harston, who was unfortunately at home.

Albert Wagner was a strange figure in this wainscoted, music-strewn room.

"Your brother?" Harston asked in surprise, getting up from the piano. He had heard nothing of the letter, but spoke cordially, for he was glad Manuella should be reconciled to her family. Nevertheless he quickly made his escape, saying:

"You will like to talk to each other after this long time." He made his escape, but not before Albert had seen that he had long hair, wore a shabby velveteen coat, no collar, and was unshaven.

"God! what a bounder for her to have married!" was the note of Albert's expressive countenance. The tone-poet was too sensitive to disregard the criticism of his cordial insincerity, even if too abstracted to care.

Albert was habited in the finest of superfine garments.

His well-cut, carefully pressed trousers were turned up over his patent leather boots and light spats. He had the latest thing in waistcoats, a black morning coat cut to accentuate his waist, a grey necktie with a pearl pin, a black pearl, almost priceless. The shining hat he guarded in his hand had a narrow mourning band, not that anyone was dead, but mourning bands were the *dernier cri* in "Modes for Men"; presently he placed it reluctantly on the piano. But when his hat was off, Manuella could see his hair shone too. Brush and brilliantine had been employed to make it lie fashionably flat above his narrow forehead. His eyes looked weak, and the skin about them was baggy. His face was blotched, and above the weak chin the weak lips were pale and the cheeks puffy. But no one could say he was not well groomed.

When Harston left them alone together he said:

"I'm jolly glad to see you again, old girl." A fraternal kiss almost broke her down, which surprised him.

"You aren't going to cry, are you?"

"Don't be so absurd." But certainly she looked as if she had been going to cry. He felt rather like it himself.

"All right! Don't bite a fellow's head off. I say, what's become of the rest of you. You're only rag and bone."

"And a hank of hair! Why don't you finish your quotation?" In quick question and answer they escaped any exhibition of feeling. When they were both more normal, Albert looked round the room:

"I say, isn't this jolly awful? Fancy the Governor and Mater leaving you to this, after Stone House and Gairoch. I call it thick—a bit too thick. They aren't over liberal to me, but this . . ."

"I've been very happy here," Manuella interposed quickly; she did not like to hear her home disparaged. She was half hysterical, extraordinarily moved at seeing him. "I like these rooms. It isn't the rooms. . . ."

He thought it "rum"; he thought everything about her rather rum; her clothes and her bounder of a

husband, and the room without pictures or ornaments. He said "Poor old girl!" and "It's rough luck," and "She always was a pincher," and other similar phrases, before they settled back into anything like their old childish intimacy.

And then it was some time before she came to her reason for sending for him. She was awkward about it, for to ask Albert for help was a reversal of all their relations.

"You said you had something to show me. . . ."

After she fetched the baby things grew a little easier between them. Baby was smiling and friendly, and Albert saw the likeness she pointed out.

"He's a rippin' little chap. You are quite right; he *is* like me. I suppose that's why you're so fond of him." For she was hiding her face in his soft hair, speaking baby language to him. It was her own eyes she wanted to hide from Albert, they were again wet. "You'll help me with him," she wanted to say, but the words would not come.

"I say, you don't mean you nurse and look after him yourself. He's got a nurse, I suppose?"

"No." Her face was still hidden, her voice stifled. "I like doing things for him myself."

"But when you go out. . . ."

"I don't go out."

"Draw it mild."

"Well, not often." She faced him then, flushing. There was no use hiding the truth or why she had sent for him.

"We're awfully poor, you know."

She went on more quickly, and now it was he who averted his face from that flushed one of hers, those wet eyes.

"I can't afford a servant or . . . or anything, until the opera is finished. You say I'm thin . . ." then she hurried more, for it was dreadful to tell him she had not enough to eat. Half a sob escaped her, changing into a laugh. "Father has given away half a million, and if

you don't help me, his grandson, in another four or five days," she cuddled the baby to her, "won't have his bottle filled. . . ." Albert could not face her.

"It isn't true."

"It's truer than true."

"Not enough to eat! I say!"

His own voice was broken, he was confounded, he had not known himself capable of so much emotion, he felt like crying; it is possible he was crying; anyway, he did not speak for a moment or two.

"You'll help us, won't you?"

"Not enough to eat! I can't believe it. Why didn't you write before, or to the Governor? It's just like you . . . you're such a fool. . . ."

Albert began to bluster; he had to do something to keep from crying, he was of course a weakling.

"It's your damned pride. . . ."

"Well, I'd rather starve than ask her for anything. She is enjoying all this newspaper gabble over that half million father is giving to the Church in South Africa. I did think of sending a picture to *The Daily Mirror* of 'Strangers relieving Lady Wagner's stepdaughter.'"

It was sob and laughter, but Albert only heard the laughter.

"Oh, shut up; don't laugh! I can't bear it. Mimi, damn it!" his eyes were quite red, "I've always been fond of you, you might have written. . . ."

He sank into a chair, and actually cried without disguise; positively she had to comfort him. She went over to him, and roughened up his hair with her disengaged hand in the old way.

"Don't cry, silly. I did write, I have written; I didn't starve. There's a lot of nourishment in porridge. It isn't as bad as all that; I can even give you a cup of tea."

"You're such a damned fool. . . ." that was by way of endearment. He kissed her again roughly; his tears were wet on her cheeks. She disengaged herself from him, laughing, and crying, and protesting.

"You're crushing baby; he'll start crying in a minute. Don't, Bertie, don't. I can't stand it. . . ."

It was not their way to be emotional with each other; Albert was soon ashamed of his tears.

"Of course something will have to be done. . . ."

"It's only tiding us over the next few weeks or months. It isn't as if there was any doubt about Harston's genius. *The Chariot Queen* will be produced in Berlin; the new opera is finer than that."

"Do you mean that all you've got to look to is what that fellow makes out of writing music?"

"When baby is a little older I could give lessons or demonstrations in cookery, or learn typing; there are ever so many things I could do. It's only the next few months. . . ." She laughed again hysterically. "Half a dozen solid meals, and the knowledge that baby wouldn't have to go without his bottle, and I believe I could make a living for us all. You don't know how clever I am. I believe I can do anything but sing."

"Sing! Why the devil should you sing?" He had not quite recovered himself; he took out his pocket-book and emptied its contents on the table. "Of course I shall see you through. How about this? Count it, will you? They'll have to fork you out an allowance. . . ."

Albert had nearly thirty pounds in his pocket-book, quite a fortune. She would only take twenty of it. She said it was all right now they were in touch with each other again.

"Twenty pounds will last me two months. By then something may have happened with the opera. . . ."

They had tea together. He held the baby whilst she made tea, and was quite clever in handling him, with the assistance of various instructions she called out to him from time to time as she got the cups and saucers.

It was whilst they were at tea she heard about all his own debts and difficulties. His allowance of five thousand a year he naturally exceeded; he was overdrawn at his bank, up to his ears in debt. His magnanimity in emptying his pocket-book for her became obvious.

"You don't know how they set about a fellow who's supposed to have money."

She heard again of money-lenders, touts and racing tipsters, of jewellers who pressed their wares. And incoherently, elliptically, she was told of other expenses.

"A fellow can't live alone; you know what I mean. A fellow gets into a mess before he knows where he is. You sent your letter to Coralie's flat." She did not stop him to say that that was Gerald's doing. "I never wanted the flat, I knew it was too expensive; she took it herself. And there are always dressmakers' bills and things. . . . You can't keep expenses down if you are the only son of a multi-millionaire. They say the Governor is going to get a peerage. I ought to have at least another five thousand a year. . . ."

She could read his life through his confidences. There had been no good influence it in, no glimpse of higher things than the gratification of his passions, appetites, or vanity. His mother had wished him to make aristocratic acquaintances, his father had been absorbed in affairs. He had been a prey to unprincipled men and women, all intent upon "getting a bit" from this scion of the millionaire house. He was ashamed of the story he had to tell—as much ashamed of his own as he was shocked at hers. He was not naturally a spendthrift, nor even extravagant, and his tastes were domestic, although he had no opportunity to indulge them in the flat he shared with a greedy theatre girl. As he talked, red-eyed and repentant, one could see that he was weak rather than wicked.

"You know, in a way, this isn't so bad when you get used to it—the baby, and all that. It's better than going from the 'Ritz' to the 'Savoy,' from one place of amusement to another, your hand in your pocket all the time. Her damned car cost me eight hundred pounds, and she goes out in it with other fellows. . . ."

He did not go away until nearly seven o'clock, until Gerald came and was introduced. Gerald seemed to Albert one degree better than his brother-in-law, but only

one degree. He thought he looked like a city clerk, which indeed he was, and that Manuella had made a most awful mess of things.

By the time he found himself outside the house, he remembered he had been forbidden to hold any communication with his disgraced and disgraceful sister, and that his stepmother had impressed it upon him. Before he dined that night, at the "Berkeley," with a couple of other fellows, he had begun to be uneasy at the consequences of his action. He was up to his neck in debt, and Lœtitia was quite capable of cutting off supplies.

When he was at Bedford Square it had been his intention to write to his parents on Manuella's behalf. Before he had finished dressing for dinner he thought it would be better to do what he could himself, on the strict *q. t.* He remembered what a hole he would be in if they did not settle up for him. He had that unsound spot in him, that soft, inherent, gangrenous selfishness.

It was a curious coincidence that he should meet Lord Lyssons that evening. He was dining at the "Berkeley," and Waldo sat at the next table. At first he did not know what to do; he looked away and felt awkward, but when Lyssons nodded to him, he returned the greeting.

"I didn't know you were back," he said, later on, when they were in the hall.

"Neither did I until yesterday. I wasn't, as a matter of fact. How is everybody? What's the news? Where are you off to? Going my way?"

Albert was flattered at Lord Lyssons' cordiality. He was going to do what he did six evenings a week, and twice on Wednesdays and Saturdays. He was going to sit in a stall in the Gaiety and watch Coralie Standing dance. Afterwards he would probably entertain her and her friends to supper. Later still, he might adjourn to a house in Bruton Street, where *chemin de fer* was played —with a *cagnotte,* but avoiding the police and the Gaming Act under the pretence of being a private house. He had already been robbed of over ten thousand pounds

there, and had a foolish hope of getting it back. He did not give the whole of the projected evening to Lord Lyssons, but answered:

"I've got a stall at the Gaiety. I suppose you haven't seen *The Whispering Girl?*"

"No. Is it very good? Do you think I could get a stall?"

"I'm pretty pally with the management. If there's one in the house they'd give it me."

"Then it will be a great thing for me to go there with you?"

"I didn't say that."

Albert, too, could be sullen. Lord Lyssons apologized for his frivolity. He shared a cab with Albert, and went to the Gaiety. A stall was secured without apparent difficulty. Albert pointed out Coralie. She wore a diamond necklace which distinguished her from the other chorus girls. Albert was not at all reticent; Waldo was apparently sympathetic.

He asked after many of their mutual acquaintances, after Sir Hubert and Lady Wagner, the Sallusts, the Banffs.

"I only got back last night, I haven't seen a soul. . . ." He asked after everyone but the one person of whom he wished to hear.

"Your father has had a stroke of paralysis; I am sorry to hear that. The last I heard of him he was in South Africa; some scheme about building churches."

"He gets about, but he isn't himself; my mother manages all his business affairs—everything. They are still in South Africa, sort of pilgrimage idea about it. No, not expiation; I don't think the Governor ever did anything he shouldn't. But *Lourdes,* you know, and that sort of thing; he thinks he'll get his health back. I say, come on to supper with us afterwards; there'll be a lot of girls. I wish you would. I'll introduce you to Coralie. She always says I don't know anyone. . . ."

Waldo actually supped at Romano's with Bertie Wagner, two touzled damsels with a last train to catch,

Coralie in her most bewitching mood, Elsie Bantock, Major Dawson, and a youth with a narrow forehead, projecting teeth and a Jewish name.

When Albert wrote to his stepmother, he chronicled the incident in the way he thought would appeal to her.

"Such a curious thing, Lyssons has turned up again. I dined and supped with him last night; he has asked me to drive down to Ranelagh with him to-morrow, seems to have taken quite a fancy to me. I suppose you don't mind. After all, it was Manuella threw him over, not he her. If he does not resent it, I suppose we need not. . . ."

Afterwards his letters were full of this growing intimacy. Albert was amazingly flattered by Waldo's interest in him. Waldo by this time knew all about Coralie and the flat, the gaming hell in Bruton Street, and all the *imbroglio* of his affairs. Waldo gave him good advice, and Albert always meant to follow it.

"All right, I'll stop away. I lose every time I go to the damned place. I believe they stack the cards; I never get a pass."

"My dear fellow"—Albert had advanced to calling Lord Lyssons "my dear fellow"—"give up Coralie and the flat! I wish to God I could. She won't let me off; she knows the Governor's 'shaky.'"

"I suppose you have promised to marry her if anything happens to him?"

"More or less."

"Principally more, I suppose. But I shouldn't do it if I were you."

And then, at last, after a fortnight of Albert's society, without hearing anything of Manuella, without being able to ask, and yet hungry to hear, he said:

"You couldn't introduce her to your sister, you know."

"I don't know that. You should see the people my sister's mixed up with. Chaps with long hair—city fellows. . . ."

He gave a short description of the stairs he had climbed to get to her, and, seeing Lord Lyssons appeared interested he went on:

"I never understood about you and Manuella. It isn't a delicate subject, is it?" Waldo shook his head as Albert looked at him interrogatively. "I thought at one time she was awfully gone on you. The mater said something one day about your being 'eccentric,' or something like that, and she turned on her like a wild cat. I don't believe she cared a bit about the chap she married; nobody could, you know. I believe the mater ragged her into it. She was certainly gone on you at one time. You don't mind me saying so, do you?"

If the hand rolling the cigarette was not quite steady, Albert was not the man to notice it.

"I hope she is happy!"

"Happy! She's damned miserable. They haven't got a bob. . . ."

The whole story came out. Albert was perhaps a little vainglorious in telling it. He had got over his emotion by now.

"I emptied my pocket-book the first time I went there. I cried like a child. She hadn't had enough to eat; she'd gone to skin and bone. . . ." Under his tan Waldo went very pale. He lit the cigarette he had rolled.

"Poor, is she?"

"Bally near starving! Of course, if the Governor was anything like himself, if he wasn't under Steppie's thumb . . ."

"You think he doesn't know?"

"Stands to reason. Why, it's a public scandal, a crying scandal, that's what it is. Over half a million in churches, and God knows what in charity, and party things. He is going to get a peerage, and you don't get a peerage for nothing, and his only daughter without a cent. She says she's going to teach, or cook. . . ."

"She is brave, then?"

"Brave! I believe you. She laughed when she told me; said porridge was sustaining if you got enough of it."

Waldo heard all the details, as he had heard all about Coralie. Albert could keep nothing to himself. Why had he asked if she were brave? Had he not known she was, and of all her high courage? He had left her when he should have stayed; understood too late.

"They are living in London?" He went on with his questions; he had to hear.

"Bedford Square."

"I wonder if she would like me to call upon her?"

"Oh, no!" Albert, Lœtitia's pupil, was ashamed lest Lord Lyssons should see how his sister lived, and where.

"Oh, no; I'm sure she wouldn't like it. No one goes to see her. She'd hate it, I'm sure. She does all the housework, minds the baby!"

"There is a baby, then?"

This conversation took place in Waldo's chambers in the "Albany," where Albert had come up for a drink. After he had made that inquiry, and been told he was not to go and see her, Lord Lyssons busied himself with the glasses, turning his back on his guest.

"Rather! quite a little ripper; it's like me—got blue eyes. I quite took to it."

"You go there often?"

"Not so very often. I tell you it gives me the hump; although it is jolly enough in a way. But I don't want to meet him, and there's another fellow, a city clerk sort of chap, who lives in the same house. They are neither of them over clean. I'm sure I don't know how Manuella stands it."

"You send her money?"

"Well, to tell the truth, I haven't sent her anything since I emptied my pocket-book . . . it isn't three weeks ago. She said it would last her a couple of months."

"You carry a lot about with you?"

"It was over twenty pounds."

"A fortune!" He could not help it; but Albert was not of a stock to understand satire.

"And her husband; doesn't he earn money?"

"He don't do a thing," Albert answered gloomily.

" He is writing something, I don't know what. That opera of his was a ghastly failure, ran a week . . ."

Bertie could not tell him any more. The intermittent trickle about his sister and her affairs dried up suddenly. " Don't let's talk of it. I'm so damned sick of the whole affair."

He went away soon afterwards. For all his promises, the baccarat tables still allured him. Waldo, however, found no difficulty in making other opportunities; Albert thought Lord Lyssons had taken a fancy to him, and, as had been seen, he wrote this to his parents. He hardly knew how it came about, some weeks later, that he found himself writing to them about Manuella. Although Waldo might have explained.

" I have said all along they ought to know. I wish you would help me—write me a draft, or dictate a letter. But it mustn't come first-hand from me. I am not supposed to see her, you know. And she says she'd sooner starve than ask help of Steppie."

Lord Lyssons may not have actually dictated the letter Lady Wagner eventually received, but it was certainly written in the Albany Chambers:

" Dear Mater and Dad,

" I think, notwithstanding my promise that her name is not to be mentioned, I ought to let you know there was a line in one of the Radical papers last Sunday about ' men who give half a million for the establishment of churches, and let their own flesh and blood die of starvation.' I thought you ought to know. There seems to be no doubt that Manuella is shockingly hard up. Her husband brought out an opera and so got himself talked about. It wasn't a success, but it was supposed to be clever and there was a lot about it in the papers, and that his wife was the only daughter of Sir Hubert Wagner. If the Governor's name is in the Birthday List, there might be some nasty talk. A man at the theatre the other night asked me if it was true there was going to be a subscription got up for the Migottis, and wasn't

she my sister? I felt rather awkward as you've forbidden me to do anything. They've got a baby and no money at all. If you could see your way to make her an allowance I should be in a position to stop all the talk, say there was never any truth in it. It needn't be much. . . ."

The brain behind that disingenuous letter was certainly a wise one. Albert himself read it aloud to Lyssons and said with pride:

"That will touch her up, I bet!"

Waldo said it was quite clever, and did him credit.

"You ought to have been in the Diplomatic Service."

"That is what Coralie's father was saying the other night."

"An ambassador himself, perhaps."

"No, no, not exactly . . . he's . . . he's a waiter in Soho."

The answer to Albert's letter came by cable, and was to the family solicitor. He was to find the whereabouts of Hubert Wagner's daughter, and pay her an allowance of eight hundred a year.

Four weeks passed, however, before that happened. In the meantime Manuella received by post a registered packet, containing ten five-pound notes. Gerald believed it came from an admirer of Harston Migotti's work. Manuella had little doubt it was from Albert. The money was still not exhausted when the news of her allowance arrived.

CHAPTER XXI

THE letter from the lawyers was very brief. They had, of course, no difficulty in finding the Migottis' address.

"We are instructed to pay to you quarterly the sum of two hundred pounds, and shall be glad if you will furnish us with the name of your bankers."

She had a little struggle with her pride before accepting it. Had the second letter come before the first the struggle would have been more severe. Certainly she would never have penned that grateful, expansive letter to her father. The second letter, four weeks later, ran:

"We are instructed to ask you not to communicate with either Sir Hubert or Lady Wagner. The allowance is a voluntary one, and will cease if there is any attempt at molestation. . . . Lady Wagner trusts you will give the same publicity to your improved circumstances as you did to the poverty you brought upon yourself by leaving your parents in ignorance of your whereabouts. . . ."

Messrs. Loftus, Son, and Cleaver, being a high-class and discreet house of law, translated Lady Wagner's intemperate letter to them as mildly as they were justified. She seemed to think it was their fault that anything dero-

gatory to the dignity of the family had been allowed to get into the papers. They had not seen the paragraphs to which she alluded. No one in the firm had seen them, which is perhaps not surprising. They defended themselves in their reply.

Before the second letter came, Manuella had already decided on moving from Bedford Square.

"We should be better in a house of our own. Don't you think so, Harston, with a garden. . . . ?"

Harston was glad, but not at all excited that she had now an income.

"You would like a room of your very own, where your papers would never be disturbed, where we should not have to take all our meals."

He thought he would like that, and amplified the idea.

"It should be a big room, with a great window overlooking green."

Gerald said Harston's tastes were very like Wagner's, although he had subordinated them so wonderfully he had the same luxurious ideas.

But Manuella had grown practical.

"We shan't be able to live in a palace on eight hundred a year."

They were all, however, agreed that it would be a good thing to have a house of their own, with fewer stairs, and a garden for the baby. Gerald would either live with them, or near.

"I can't do without Gerald," Harston said affectionately, and his future biographer was quite overwhelmed.

In house-hunting it is unusual to find the ideal, and certainly it is never found quickly. It was after many fruitless and wearisome days that Manuella arrived at the *cul-de-sac* out of Circus Road, St. John's Wood, and in the first three minutes discovered she had been indeed so fortunate. There was a large secluded garden, with fine old trees, and an overgrown lawn. The house was of less importance. It was on two floors and the rooms were small. Built during the Victorian era, it had no archi-

tectural pretensions. There was nothing even vaguely reminiscent of Queen Anne; the Adam Brothers or Mr. Garnier might never have been. But Manuella knew nothing of architecture. That which fascinated her was the walled seclusion of the generous garden. After that she became aware of a big studio to which the drawing-room had been sacrificed. She heard afterwards that the house had been for many years in the possession of a bachelor artist. There *was* no drawing-room. That fact, and the smallness of the dark dining-room, with the inconvenient little sitting-room, accounted for it having been so long unoccupied. The studio ran right up to the wall of the garden; it was long and narrow, top-lighted. It was inaccessible from the kitchen, or might have served as a dining-room. In fact, from a house-agent's point of view, it was a completely selfish room, only suitable for its former occupant. But Manuella saw all the possibilities in it. Here Harston could be uninterrupted; he would be, as it were, cut off from the household. The small sitting-room was quite large enough for her; the dining-room could be made lighter. Upstairs there were four bedrooms and a bath-room. Part of the garden had been sacrificed to the studio, but enough remained to make one forget how near it was to the Edgware Road, and all the noise of London.

When she had finished her inspection of the house, she stood under one of the old trees in the garden, a leafy and luxuriant chestnut, and looked about her. She knew already this was to be her new home. There was a tangle of weeds in the flower-bed under the wall, overgrown grass was on the small lawn. A broken plaster figure of a Naiad lay in a stone basin that had once been a fountain. There was barely a quarter of an acre altogether, including the ground covered by the house and studio; but it seemed almost an estate to Manuella after the rooms in Bedford Square. She was so eager to secure it when she went back to the agent, that they put the rent up five pounds, and made her sign an agreement, there and then, which left her to pay for all the improve-

ments the lessor had been ready to make. Always impulsive, she signed eagerly; all that seemed to matter was that no one else should see the house, and take it out of her hands. When she had signed that most unfair agreement, she forgot that she had ever had a trouble in the world. Buckingham Palace could have given her no more pleasure. And the rent was only sixty-five pounds a year; two servants would be enough. She had learnt economy in the hardest school of all. Eight hundred pounds a year was now a fortune to her, and she did not mean to dissipate it.

Harston disengaged himself from his libretto that evening on the demand of her excitement. It was, of course, Paradise that she had discovered, of which she had become the proprietor. He even teased her about it, and was comparatively human and interested.

Of course his interest did not last out the evening; he soon got back to Cartismandua and Caractacus, and the entry of the captives into Rome. He had found the name for the opera now, it was to be called *Il Traditore*. And he had come back to Gerald's way of thinking about scenery.

"Those people who are writing about producing *The Chariot Queen* want to know exactly how I had the setting in my mind; they will perhaps want me to conduct it. . . ."

"Everything will be easy when we get to the new house. It will bring us luck, I feel it will," Manuella answered.

Gerald inquired about furniture, and was eager for her to try the three years' hire system, but Manuella felt that in her own home she must have her own furniture.

"We shall want so little. It is a tiny house, all but the studio. What we have here will go into the studio."

"The less furniture there is in a music-room the better for the acoustics."

"As if I didn't know that." She laughed at Gerald for trying to teach her.

Albert came the next day. He knew all about the eight

hundred a year, and took the entire credit for it. He heard about the paradise in St. John's Wood, and promised to help her to furnish it. He suggested Mellier's, in Albemarle Street, but Manuella thought old curiosity shops in and about Tottenham Court Road would be more suitable.

Albert, when he went away, forgot all about his promise; he was just off to spend Easter in Monte Carlo. But a number of things Manuella had not bought arrived from time to time at the new house, and she never doubted but that they were from him. Someone must evidently have been up there, for everything fitted some nook or recess. There came a pair of easy chairs covered in chintz for the little sitting-room, a quaintly-shaped sofa to match them, a Chinese vase made into an electric lamp, and a few prints and water-colours. For the bedroom there were two bow-fronted chests of drawers, matching the tallboy from Bedford Square. Who but Albert knew she had a tallboy in her bedroom? There were rugs and a little Sheraton bookcase. It was wonderful how clever Albert was in knowing what she wanted!

"Isn't he good?" she said to Gerald.

She could not write and thank him, for he was at Monte Carlo, and she did not know at which hotel.

By May the grass was cut in the garden. Harston liked his big room, and said there was no doubt he could write there. Two servants had been secured, and everything was in order.

Gerald was to lodge with them; Harston could not do without him; he was always ready to copy the growing score, play the concerted pieces.

Manuella intended to become an expert gardener; she bought seeds and books, and was planting herbaceous borders, making a rock-garden and new flower-beds, as if she had an acre to exploit instead of less than a quarter. She put in everything the local florist sold her, and watched daily for the results, anticipating the time when the bare pergola would be a bower of roses. She was in such

a hurry with her bulbs that some of them went in upside-down. She consulted catalogues, and believed everything she read in them. All her beauty came back to her: she was flushed like one of the damask roses that she so optimistically anticipated on her pergola.

Before the end of the summer quite a number of people had had tea in the garden, admired the bare pergola and the baby, and stayed to supper in the little dining-room. Gerald said Harston was beginning to be known. And all at once it seemed to be true. In Bedford Square, where there was one room for Harston's work, and in which all their meals were taken, it would have been impossible to entertain, but here entertainment was easy. Gerald Streatfield said earnestly that it was good for Harston to see people, to disseminate talk about his work; and Manuella began to find pleasure in exercising hospitality. She liked her suppers to be praised; she began to be house-proud.

Of course, the majority of the people who came were what Albert and his friends would call "long-haired musicians." They treated Harston with respect and deferred to his opinion. Gerald may have set the note, but they easily were in time with it. With all the women who came—young singers, aspirants for the stage, even Society ladies, it was not necessary for Gerald to set the note. Manuella was astounded to see how much flattery Harston could bear, and not only bear, but obviously enjoy. He would play to them, listen to their bad singing and tell them where it was wrong, harshly or contemptuously. But his contempt for their voices was tempered with compliments on their complexions. They liked his candour, therefore, accepting him as a musical Rochester. He could say what he liked.

Some of these ladies kissed his hands, and he kissed theirs occasionally. That, of course, was owing to his artistic temperament, to which everything abnormal in him was attributed. A good deal of kissing seemed to be going on, although Manuella might not have noticed it, had Mrs. Des Vœux refrained from pointing it out.

Mrs. Des Vœux was the wife of Oscar Des Vœux, the well-known singing-master. His most famous pupil was his half-sister, Madame Alma Orilia, a young opera singer, whose first appearance in England in the previous year had occasioned a veritable *furore*.

Manuella took a dislike to Mrs. Des Vœux the first time she called upon her.

"What on earth do you find to do with yourself all day in this out-of-the-world place?" Mrs. Des Vœux had queried.

But Gerald, and even Harston, assured her that it was a testimony to his growing reputation that the Des Vœux should call upon them at all.

"Alma Orilia will be here this week or next."

Harston's fortune would be made, everything would be easy, if Alma Orilia took a fancy to Harston Migotti and would sing his music.

"For heaven's sake don't take a dislike to Mrs. Des Vœux or offend her," Gerald urged.

Manuella subordinated her feelings, therefore, and put up with Mrs. Des Vœux's society in the hopes that, when Alma Orilia came over to England, she might be introduced to Harston. All of them heard a great deal about Alma Orilia; she was Mrs. Des Vœux's favourite topic of conversation.

"You will have to look after your husband, my dear, if she does take a fancy to him," she said, with that short, hard laugh of hers. "Alma is a regular man-eater; Juan has fought two duels already on her account. He will never divorce her, because he is a Roman Catholic."

"Or because he is a gambler, and she makes many thousands a year," someone interpolated in an undertone.

Mrs. Des Vœux spoke as if to have had lovers were a feather in her sister-in-law's cap. Manuella hastily said, of course, that she should not look after Harston, and Mrs. Des Vœux laughed again.

"We shall see. All the wives say that at first."

In June the arrival of Alma Orilia was announced.

Soon after that, the Des Vœux gave their grand annual concert and reception in Harley Street. Alma Orilia was staying with them. Gerald brought home all the musical gossip. She would sing at Covent Garden and at two concerts—otherwise, nowhere but at her brother's house and perhaps in Seaford Place.

"She is in glorious voice this season, I'm told; better, if possible, than last. The King and Queen want to hear her as Elsa; it has all been arranged."

The Migottis received an invitation to the Des Vœux's party, and Gerald looked upon it as a royal command. Manuella's first instinct was to refuse.

"But you must go," he exclaimed. "You must!"

"They don't want me. They make a fuss about Harston, but I'm sure they don't care if I go or not."

She was overruled; in these days she was always overruled in everything that did not touch her own domestic kingdom.

Afterwards it seemed that all the rest had been but an interlude; a new phase of life began for her on the evening of Mrs. Des Vœux's party. She had thought herself happy in her little home, with her garden and her thriving baby, having grown used to Harston and her detached attitude toward him. She had put the past deliberately behind her, and tried to be happy.

But there are no happy endings to loveless marriages. She had never loved Harston Migotti, but had run away from love, as young girls do sometimes, and forced her way ignorantly, wilfully, into a shadow-land where duty became the one bright star. She had hitched her waggon to it, but the couplings were not to hold securely, nor without jar.

CHAPTER XXII

EVERYONE knows the Des Vœux's house in Harley Street. To-night, when Manuella and Harston Migotti drove up in their taxi-cab, the string of carriages and motor-cars was half-way up the Marylebone Road; it was like a gala night at the Opera House.

The hall was full, the rooms where they left their wraps were overcrowded; the stentorian hired waiter called out their names between others more important and better known.

"Lady Christobel Carruthers and Count Feresties; Miss Stanton; Mr. Patrick Stuart. Her Grace the Duchess of Malmesbury, and Lady Violet Braid, Mr. and Mrs. Migotti, the Countess of Chichester. . . ."

The ugliness of the large bare double drawing-room, with its hideous wall-paper, was concealed by the shifting figures and groups of fashionable people; attention was distracted by the medley of bare shoulders and chains of pearls, exquisite coronets, dresses from Paris *ateliers,* of soft lace and soft stuffs glowing with embroideries; jargon from Mayfair, long hair from Bohemia, artificial manner from Stageland, foreign tongues from everywhere. Here were the people who rented opera-boxes, and those who made opera possible; the great ladies who took their two-guinea singing lessons from Oscar des Vœux, and the *artistes* who owed him everything, and

paid him nothing; the great Russian dancer, the prima-donna of musical comedy, everybody.

Manuella, after the perfunctory greeting from her hostess, found herself only watching. She was conscious of isolation; Harston's friends were her acquaintances, the Stone House acquaintances were dummy figures bowing; she felt curiously alone, although she recognized so many faces.

For a long time, or it seemed a long time to her, she remained by herself. Harston had soon left her; he was surrounded by women, his hair seemed astonishingly long, and Manuella, perhaps a little bitterly, thought he was like Gilbert's Bunthorne. She herself was not flirtatious, but there was no other word that seemed to her to fit Harston's manner with women. She felt contempt for it, yet it hurt her pride in some way, probably because it lowered him in her eyes. She always wished to look upon him as a genius, but paying compliments and receiving extravagant ones, bowing over hands and kissing them, belittled him. In this attitude he was not Wagner, or Beethoven, or Mozart—only Bunthorne.

"Mr. Graham wishes me to present him to you."

She was startled out of her thoughts, roused from watching her husband, by her hostess, who was in a hurry to get back to her more important guests. More important than Manuella, not than Peter Graham; few people in the room were more important than he.

Manuella Wagner had been accounted a beauty at her first drawing-room. In the two years that had passed since then promise had become fulfilment. At eighteen she had not come to her full height; now she was tall and slender as a young ash tree. Her hair was not fashionably arranged; the dark abundance of it, parted in the middle, was twisted into a great soft coil low down on her slender neck. Her face had little colour, but a porcelain bloom, a transparency behind which glowed the white flame of her contempt when Brema Tietgens, who had been in *The Chariot Queen,* flopped to the ground in a curtsey before Harston, and he raised her,

kissed her hand, and accepted her ridiculous homage. The contempt burned darker in her dark eyes, the fire of it was caught in the thick, curled lashes. The bow of her mouth was pomegranate red. There was no woman at all in that brilliant assembly who compared with her in looks. So thought Peter Graham when he asked for that introduction.

Peter Graham, a bachelor of about forty, wealthy and reputed of Jewish origin, was a well-known amateur violinist. He had the reputation of being a lady-killer; he would have repudiated the coarseness of the expression, but never the innuendo. Mr. Graham lived in Hertford Street, where he possessed an unrivalled collection of old Italian stringed instruments and a music-room acoustically perfect. He gave quartet and other parties of great distinction. Chamber music, and his collection of violins, held all of his heart that he could spare from women. Without ever having been in the Divorce Court it was always admitted that he was a born co-respondent.

Peter Graham was of a slender and elegant figure, bearing his forty odd years as gracefully as a dancer carries a bouquet; there was really an air of chivalry about him. It was true that he was bald, extraordinarily bald for so young a man, but the expanse of forehead gave value to his dark expressive eyes; his dark moustache had grey in it and he wore a goatee, now, too, getting grey. His thin skin was like a woman's. There was something of the foreigner in his manner, in his elegance, in the slight burr of his r's. But not Albert Wagner, nor any sartorial critic, could have questioned his clothes. His sleeve links were cut antique gems, a rare and exquisite intaglio was the ring that he wore on the little finger of his slender hand, the buttons of his white waistcoat were old enamels. The pearls in his shirt were quite small. He had not, however, an original mind, and after Mrs. Des Vœux moved away he played the well-known opening gambit.

"I was saying to Mrs. Des Vœux that I am quite sure we must have met somewhere."

Manuella could not remember the occasion, but was interested in trying to recall it. He realized her ingenuousness, and it completed the conquest her beauty had begun.

"If we have not met before, I shall hope, at least, this will be the first of many times."

Manuella hoped so too, she could do no less. Other banal courtesies were exchanged.

"Alma Orilia is here, isn't she? Is she going to sing, do you know?" Manuella asked him presently.

"You are interested in Alma Orilia?"

"We want her to hear my husband's music, to sing, perhaps, in his opera."

"His opera!" Peter Graham had not caught her name, and he connected her with no husband, she looked like a girl.

"Harston Migotti. He wrote *The Chariot Queen*," Manuella explained.

"Oh, yes, of course. Yes, she is here. Would you like me to present her to you? We are old friends."

"Not to me, to my husband. But Mr. Des Vœux will do that, he has promised."

Peter Graham had a fine taste, the feast he saw before him tickled it.

"You sang the title rôle in your husband's opera, did you not? It was unfortunate I was abroad at the time it was produced. I might have been able to have been of some use to you."

It was true that he might have been of use to them. Peter Graham had sufficient wealth and influence to have dressed the house on the first night with the right people, to have said the right word before the Press said theirs. And neither O'Neill nor Otterstein would have refused *The Chariot Queen* consideration if Peter Graham had endorsed it.

"But perhaps it is not too late now. May I open the matter to Alma?"

"But how kind!"

"Not at all. I will speak to her at once, she will not

sing until later, until the room is quite full. Which is your husband? Oh!"

The exclamation was due to the fact that Des Vœux was before him with the introduction.

"That is Madame Orilia with Oscar Des Vœux; I suppose that is your husband to whom he is talking now?"

"Is she really as good as they say?"

"I should say quite. Tell me, are *you* going to sing to-night?"

"I have given up singing. I have never been trained. I only sang because at the last moment Madame Stella Lily threw them over, and there was no one else."

"You liked the life?"

"I hated it."

"You are quite right, if I may say so, if you don't mind my saying so. Public life for a woman, stage life, brushes off the bloom. I knew without your telling me that you did not like it."

"How did you know?"

"I have an instinct." He went on to talk about his instincts, implying they were rarely at fault where a beautiful woman was concerned.

"Will you come down to supper with me?"

Peter Graham confessed to the artistic temperament. Already he knew he was about to fall in love, was conscious of the preliminary thrill, the sense of adventure.

Supper at the Des Vœux's party, like the soup at the famous dinner-party Heine describes, was conspicuous by its absence. In the dining-room, to which he piloted her, there were traces of "light refreshments"; empty dishes that had once held sandwiches and a few cakes.

But, standing against the buffet, no longer Bunthorne but himself, was Harston, deep in conversation with, as Manuella quickly decided, one of the ugliest women she had ever seen.

"Alma, Madame Migotti wishes to be presented to you," Peter Graham was eager to carry out this beautiful

girl's first request. Manuella named Harston to him, and Peter had the right word, the appropriate word.

Under her heavy lids, the great soprano looked at the composer's wife. She knew all about the composer, her brother had told her, but nothing about his wife. And Des Vœux had omitted to mention about Harston Migotti that he was of great physical attraction, astonishingly handsome.

"I am so glad to meet you," Manuella began impulsively. But that she and Alma Orilia took an immediate dislike to each other was obvious from the first moment. Manuella wanted to say that she had heard of her marvellous voice, and was longing to hear her sing, she thought she would add something about Harston's music, and ask her to come to Circus Road. But she did nothing of the sort. Alma Orilia was never a favourite with women, and she looked at this one almost insolently, responded coldly, turning away and continuing her conversation with the musician as if the interruption had been ill-timed and ill-bred. Harston, too, or so it seemed to Manuella, resented it.

"My wife is unused to Society."

She actually heard him saying that as she moved away. Unused to Society! But why, and since when? She flushed, and Peter, who, whether or not his knowledge of women was as profound as he imagined, certainly understood Alma, knew she had administered a snub, and looked curiously at Harston.

"Your husband is very good-looking."

"So Madame Orilia seems to think." That she had flushed angrily, and given vent to the quick retort, gave him an opportunity to exhibit his tact.

"She is intolerant of feminine beauty; you ought to feel flattered."

"Oh! I don't care; she can be as rude to me as she likes, so long as she will sing in *Il Traditore.*"

"I think you may leave that to me," he said confidently. "And now, tell me . . ."

He wanted to know all about her, what she did with

her life. She was only half caught, although it was so long since she had been the objective of any man's attractions. She did not even hear all he said to her, or anything of what he implied. She was conscious all the time that her husband never left Alma Orilia's side, and that presently, when the singer mounted the platform, it was he, and not Oscar Des Vœux, who went with her.

"He is surely not going to play her accompaniment!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, I think your husband is going to play her accompaniment. You don't mind, do you? I thought you said. . . ."

"Of course I don't mind," Manuella answered hastily, "only it seems so strange."

Peter Graham read the symptoms more accurately, and certainly more quickly, than she read them herself. She was going to be jealous of Alma. What he knew even better was that Alma would give her plenty of occasion for it. Alma was the very devil if she took it into her head to wish to spite a woman, or take a man from her. Peter had the mind that enabled him to read Alma's, and he had read it when he introduced them. Harston Migotti had attracted and Manuella's good looks vexed her. Manuella would not have thought it possible that she could be jealous of Harston, seeing that she had never loved him, but Peter Graham knew better.

Now in the hush that followed her appearance on the platform Alma Orilia stood silent, whilst Harston's fingers touched the keys. There was a little applause before she began; he played the opening prelude to the sound of it.

Alma Orilia, then almost at the beginning of her career, already famous, and, before the end of this story, notorious, was in her twenty-seventh year, of a superb and sensual ugliness, more compelling than beauty. She was dark, so dark that it would seem impossible she could be of European birth. The heavy lids drooped over her eyes. Her lips were full, cheek-bones high, the bushy brows nearly met. Her bust was pronounced, and her

neck thick. But under the drooping lids the eyes were like jewels, the thick lips that parted when she sang or smiled showed white and even teeth.

"Madame Orilia will sing an A and B," Oscar Des Vœux announced briefly.

The A was of extreme simplicity. It was Spohr's arrangement of *"Rose wie bist du so schön";* the song Richard Wagner chronicles as having been sung to him by his niece Johanna, when she was fifteen, which led him to prophesy her artistic future. For the B she gave the Elsa song.

Manuella, listening, spell-bound, against her will, remembered that her own voice had once been likened to velvet. She realized now that, if the analogy held, hers was but a poor cotton-backed variety. This rich singing, these deep, organ-like notes and fluty upper ones were satin lined and silken-fibred, grandly woven. There was absolute silence while Alma Orilia sang, followed by a tumult of applause and congratulation. All the duchesses and countesses wished for introductions; but from every introduction she turned to her accompanist, to Harston; there seemed to be no one else to whom she cared to talk for any length of time.

Manuella, rousing herself from what she felt was an unreasoning irritation at the conspicuousness of this conduct, realized that Mr. Graham was asking her if she would dine with him one night in Hertford Street. "You and your husband. I will get up a small party, is there anyone you would care to meet? I should so like to see you in my house; I have a few things there that might interest you."

She said she would like very much to come. When he had taken his leave, the room was already more than half empty. The crux of the entertainment had been Alma Orilia's singing, and, when it was over, it was merely a question as to who could get away first. Manuella wanted to go, too, but Harston made no attempt at leave-taking.

She went over to him and said:

"It is very late."

"But we have not nearly finished our talk."

Alma Orilia treated her as if she had been a child, interrupting important affairs. If she did not actually say, "Go away," her manner said it, and not too courteously. Manuella had not the perfect temper to meet this treatment. She stood her ground. Mrs. Des Vœux was yawning ostentatiously; a few *artistes* lingered talking to Oscar.

"Harston, I'm tired, I want to go."

He rose, he could do no less; he had not noticed the antagonism between the two women.

"But, of course, we are very late. . . ."

Alma was furious that Manuella had carried her point, it was a small thing, but the famous prima-donna could not bear opposition even in small things.

"You must call and see me, we must talk more."

She did not include his wife in the invitation.

"May I?"

His eagerness mollified her; she saw, too, that it annoyed Manuella.

"What a hateful woman!" was her first sentence when she and Harston were alone in the cab.

"Hateful? You are dreaming. Hateful? I never met a more delightful person."

"I suppose she buttered you up all the time."

"She wants to see *The Chariot Queen* score."

"To kiss your hand, and call you 'Maestro'!"

"I don't know what has come to you. You are not jealous, surely you are not jealous?"

Her pride mounted, and repudiated the charge.

"Jealous! She is the ugliest woman I've ever seen. If I were going to be jealous, it wouldn't be of that."

He laughed, and put an arm about her.

"My little wife of the hearth; but of course you are jealous."

He was in high good humour; the whole evening he had been recognized, flattered, talked about, and it was almost certain, if suitable arrangements could be made, if

she liked the music—and of that he had no doubt—that Alma Orilia would create the part of Queen Cartismandua in *Il Traditore*. He was injudicious, but ever since she had sung so badly in *The Chariot Queen*, his wife had become inconsiderable in his eyes; she could take care of the house and play with the baby.

"What a Boadicea she would have made! But the Cartismandua music is better, it is altogether a better rôle. She has a superb presence, the voice of the century, I should say quite the voice of the century; such volume, such extraordinary range, such tone, and what amazing flexibility and expression! And she herself, she has temperament, dramatic power, intensity. . . ."

"Was Boadicea a negress?" Manuella asked flippantly. "I should think the only thing Alma Orilia would play perfectly, looking the part, would be the old woman with the bandana in *On the Road to Mandalay*."

"So it is true, the little one is jealous," he laughed. "But there is no cause; it is only to hear her sing my music I go to her to-morrow morning. Some one must sing my music."

"I don't care who sings it as long as I don't."

He shrugged his big shoulders.

"If you had only never attempted it!"

"I didn't do it to please myself."

He answered more seriously.

"That is of the past; of the present is Alma Orilia and Queen Cartismandua. Already she is interested."

"In you, not in your music."

"That is as it may be! You think she has fallen in love with me? Well! and then, if it is so, how good it would be! She would not be the first . . ."

"Me! I suppose you mean."

"I mean nothing, nothing but that if I interest her she will sing in my opera."

Manuella turned a disgusted shoulder to him, remaining obstinately silent to his eulogies of Alma Orilia. It was obvious the prima-donna had flattered his vanity. In return, he credited her with capacities and intentions,

a range of parts beyond any woman's possibilities. She had got into his head like wine.

"How can you say she is ugly! With those eyes in which you see emotions rise, that superb throat from which the voice gushes like clear water from a well. . . ."

When, at length, the cab stopped before their door, he got out before she did. He had been brought up in Germany, where little attentions and courtesies to women are no part of a man's daily life. She followed him, thinking that, if he had been Mr. Graham, he would have waited for her, and paid the cab instead of leaving her to do it. She was loyal to him; she had surely kept her vows and made him a good wife, but the time had passed when she would not criticize him.

He went straight to the music-room without waiting to say more to her—even "Good-night"; she heard him playing far into the small hours.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE next few days Harston was rarely at home, and, when he was, he talked continually about Alma Orilia. Manuella found herself in a perpetual ill-temper, which Gerald's enthusiasm was quite unable to assuage.

She was in the garden when Albert's letter was brought to her. Her bad temper had made her oblivious of the fact that it was ten days since she had seen or heard anything of Albert, who was usually a constant visitor. All the morning she had been rolling the little lawn, and unnecessarily weeding the flower-beds, tying up the tall, flowerless stalks of that elusive herbaceous border, syringing the roses against the green-fly that had not yet made its appearance. Manuella, so far, had not found floriculture as easy as housewifery, but she was very persevering.

Albert's letter changed the current of her thoughts. For some reason or another, probably at Lord Lyssons' instigation, he had never mentioned Waldo's name to her; she did not even know he had returned to England. All the colour left her face when she read Albert's letter, but is was not on Albert's account; she hardly took in the sense of what he wrote, she was so startled at seeing Waldo's name on the page.

"I am off to South Africa, rather in a hurry. Waldo advises it; you remember Lord Lyssons? Whatever has happened wasn't my fault, I was driven into it.

If you want a pal whilst I'm away, write Lyssons; he's a real good sort, I find; anyway, he's done me a good turn now. He will tell you all about it. . . ."

It was startling, incomprehensible. *Waldo!* he was back in England, then! She was to see him, write to him! The ground of that little garden seemed uneven; it appeared to rise and be unstable beneath her feet. Her lips trembled; she put down the gardening tools, and went into the house. *Waldo!*

Harston and Alma Orilia, Mr. Peter Graham, from whom she had had an invitation, roses, even a visit, ceased to exist. She had put the thought of Waldo so resolutely from her mind. At first it had been difficult, almost more than difficult; he came to her in dreams, in wakeful hours, when she was most unhappy, when she was a little happier. The work of the flat, the adventure of the theatre, the birth of the baby, however, had helped her to forget. But Albert's letter brought it all back—the dull, aching pain of it, the memory and the knowledge. She had thought she would never see him again nor hear of him; she had even hoped it.

"What shall I do?" That was the cry of her heart; she had a sickness of longing for him, a moment of forgetfulness of everything else.

Of course, when she had time to collect herself, she knew she would do nothing. But, after that, all the quiet of her life seemed to have gone. The knowledge that he was in London haunted her; everything was altered although nothing had changed.

Alma Orilia's triumph over her, had the prima-donna but known it, became a very poor and tawdry thing. Alma imagined her as a rival, thought the two of them were contending for Harston Migotti's affections; took pains to let her know that Harston spent his mornings with her, and the evenings too, when she was not singing at Covent Garden. She was really succeeding with him, establishing an influence, but what she wanted was that his wife should know it. Manuella did know it but,

after Albert's letter came, and she knew that Lord Lyssons was in London, she ceased to care; at least, it became of little importance.

Gerald, taking quick advantage of her change of mood, reminded her she owed Mrs. Des Vœux a visit, and was not justified in omitting it because Alma Orilia was staying there.

Gerald's note-book was accumulating new material. If there should be an intrigue between Harston and the prima-donna, it would be of immense value to the biography. He wished he could have discussed it with Manuella; he knew that almost everyone was talking of their sudden intimacy. Gerald was eager for more detail, and wished to probe his hero's mind. Harston only spoke of Alma Orilia as an *artiste,* a superb *artiste.* Gerald wanted to know more.

Although social convention was regarded less in this Bohemian world than at Stone House, Gerald argued that there were certain obligations necessary to fulfill.

"I don't want to meet that woman."

"It is very unlikely she will be at home."

Gerald would have appreciated her confidence, but failed in obtaining it. He could not have conceived how little Harston's vagaries possessed Manuella just now. Somewhere, some day, she would meet Waldo; it might even be to-day! Her dislike of Alma Orilia became perfunctory, occupying the back instead of the foreground of her mind.

She went to pay that visit to the Des Vœux, walking from Circus Road to Harley Street, and all the way her mind was full of the possibility that she might meet Waldo; every tall figure in the distance, or on the other side of the road, set her heart beating, or brought the colour into her cheeks. She arrived at Harley Street, however, without adventure. She hoped to escape with the mere formality of card-leaving, but happened, unfortunately, upon Mrs. Des Vœux's "At Home" day, and was following her name into the drawing-room before she had time to realize it.

Seen by daylight, and without the large company that had mitigated, without disguising, its essential ugliness, this large modernized house, ill-thought out, slovenly in its lack of decorative scheme, furnished too cheaply for its size, bare of beautiful things, gave her a preliminary chill. The carpet on the staircase was Brussels, of a design that but served to accentuate its crude colouring; the walls were papered with an abomination of terra-cotta chrysanthemums above a white painted dado.

The drawing-room carpet repeated the atrocities of the staircase. An even worse portrait of Oscar Des Vœux than the one in the dining room hung over the mantelpiece, on which were also an ormolu clock under a glass shade, two light brown, possibly bronze, figures, holding up candelabra that could only have come from Vienna, and two yellow cats, hideously misshapen, in bastard china, presumably Japanese.

There were several people in the room to whom the advent of a new victim appeared as a relief. One or two got up to go at once, and whilst they were saying their farewells, Manuella had time to wonder why she had come, and to wish she had been less punctilious.

Her hostess greeted her civilly. Having secured Harston Migotti as an intimate *habitué* of the house, it was unnecessary to pay much attention to his wife. Alma Orilia, gorgeously arrayed in the bright colours she affected, resented the visit, and the girl's self-possession, and showed it in her own way.

"I saw your husband this morning. He did not say you were calling."

"Probably he didn't know."

"You do not tell each other everything. *Hein?*"

Manuella laughed. She had left off being out of temper, and now thought it impossible Harston could be attracted by this ugly woman.

"Oh, yes, we do, everything of importance."

"How? Everything of importance! It is not important, then, that you come to see me?"

She was already red with anger. It was insufferable

that this wife of Harston Migotti should not resent that her husband was with her so constantly. Mrs. Des Vœux dashed into the conversation with her shrill laugh.

"If Oscar paid as much attention to any woman as your husband pays to Alma, I should be simply mad with jealousy. He is never out of the house."

A diversion was made by the entry of two new guests.

"Mrs. Straus. Mrs. Warner."

If they had been announced even five minutes later Manuella might have escaped; but, as it was, she kept her seat reluctantly.

"We had such a charming evening at your house last week," chorussed Mrs. Straus and Mrs. Warner, two ill-dressed ladies from some suburb that made them inconsiderable. Mrs. Des Vœux smiled abstractedly, gave a limp hand, and said:

"Oh, yes," as if she were tired of admitting it. Baiting Manuella was more to her taste than entertaining them.

"Mrs. Russell Marston."

A streak of vivid personality, with black eyes, black hair, and foreign accent, hung with pearls, picturesquely dressed, made a diversion, filling the room with scent and an overpowering good-nature. She was kissing Alma, greeting everybody, accepting tea, before Manuella had time to wonder who she was.

"You are the wife of Harston Migotti?" she said to Manuella. "You know Russell is delighted with his *suite*."

Russell Marston was a great conductor, the greatest, perhaps, since Richter. Manuella had not even known Harston had submitted him a *suite*. "He is so glad you are going to sing the Boadicea song at the concert," she went on, to Alma.

"The Boadicea song!"

Manuella could not refrain from the exclamation, or the sudden flush of heightened colour.

Mrs. Des Vœux said ill-naturedly, with an assumption of carelessness:

"I don't think Mrs. Migotti has heard Alma is singing the Invocation song at Albert Hall."

"You do not tell each other everything," interpolated Alma, with a smile of indescribable malice.

"It is your song, is it not? You sang it when *The Chariot Queen* was produced?" Lulu Marston asked. She took in quickly that there were undercurrents here, that there was antagonism, and she wished to assuage it.

"From what I have heard, I should not say she *sang* it," Alma Orilia said, with another laugh.

"But, my dear, we have not all your wonderful voice."

"I sang it because there was no one else," Manuella said simply, rising to go. This singer, whatever Harston might say, was an ill-bred woman, objectionable in every way. She was welcome to sing the song, or any other; but it was unnecessary to stay and be insulted by her.

"I don't suppose you will go to the concert," Mrs. Des Vœux said, as she said good-bye to her. "I should not, if I were you. . . ."

"Oh! I shall go if I get a seat," she said carelessly. "My husband is sure to want me to be there," she added, resenting the attitude of both women, but holding her head high, and showing little sign of it.

"Would you care to come to my box?" Mrs. Marston asked. She did not understand exactly what was going on, but was the most good-hearted, good-natured of erratic women, and had none of the littlenesses of her sex. "If you have not a seat, will you come to my box? I can call for you in the motor, if you like, or send it for you. Where is it you live?"

"I really shouldn't go," Mrs. Des Vœux said, with emphasis. "You will hate to hear the Boadicea song sung by anyone else. . . ."

"Thank you, I should like it very much," Manuella answered, without heeding the advice. "I live in the Circus Road. Don't bother to send for me, only give me the number of the box."

"Twenty-seven. But it is no bother." Lulu Marston was almost as impulsive as Manuella; she took a sudden

fancy to the girl. She could afford to admire another woman's beauty, having sufficient of her own.

Mrs. Straus and Mrs. Warner, having been ignored long enough, made their adieux and went out with Manuella. Directly they went, Alma and Mrs. Des Vœux began to talk at once to Lulu Marston about the airs the composer's wife gave herself, and her bad manners.

Peter Graham had imprudently admired Manuella to Mrs. Des Vœux; Alma had her own reason for disliking her. Neither of them had a good word for the girl, and Lulu found it difficult to defend her on so insufficient an acquaintance, although she neither altered her opinion nor forgot the promise.

Manuella upbraided Harston, when she got home, for concealing from her that Alma Orilia would sing the "Invocation" song at the Albert Hall concert, and that he had sent Russell Marston a *suite* for the orchestra. Harston found it difficult to explain his silence. Gerald tried to throw oil upon the troubled waters. He, too, it appeared, had known about it.

"He thought you might be hurt."

"Yes; that is what I thought, that you would be hurt."

"You didn't suppose I should be less hurt hearing it from her than from you."

"I had no idea you were going there to-day."

"So she told me."

Harston had to acknowledge that Alma had asked him to keep it from his wife's knowledge.

"You see, the idea is that, if she makes a success with the song, she will be more ready to create the rôle of Cartismandua in *Il Traditore*. You know how important that would be," Gerald urged.

But now Manuella resented his interference between her and her husband. Before the day of the concert there were several little scenes. Gerald was so sympathetic toward both of them, so curious and communicative, that he got upon her nerves. To get rid of him became urgent, imperative.

"Baby ought to have a day as well as a night nursery; the house is small, I should like it to myself."

She did not say exactly this, but practically that was what it amounted to. When a man, not without a conscience, and even a heart, is deceiving his wife, he is quick to do her small favours. He made a slight objection.

"But Gerald is so useful to me. . . ."

"You are so seldom at home," was the quick retort.

Gerald went back to the rooms in Bedford Square, and gave Harston an additional reason for continual absences.

She had expected to hear again from Albert, but no letter came. When the days went by, and she heard from neither him nor Waldo, she had an unreasonable anger against Lord Lyssons. He ought to have come or written; he might have known she would be anxious about Albert.

She was very restless, and, it must be confessed, a little quarrelsome. She felt Harston was keeping things back from her, intriguing against her with Alma Orilia. She could not forgive herself for caring so little, and resenting it so much. Peace fled from that little house; there were scenes and recriminations. It was worse, not better, when Gerald had gone.

"You will not make a scene at the concert?" Harston asked her.

"That depends how I feel. I shall do just as I like," she answered.

It was obvious he was ill at ease; he had been amazed at her exhibitions of temper, and was now half afraid of her. His conscience was not clear, but his work was not suffering, because it was practically complete. The score of *Il Traditore* was in the printer's hands. He knew it depended upon himself whether Alma Orilia created the title rôle or not; she made little secret of his attraction for her. Notwithstanding all her gifts she was a mere animal of a woman.

He went off early on the day of the concert, unable to obtain any assurance from his wife. He could only report

to Alma, who was full of interest, that he did not know what she would do; she was quite unaccountable.

True to her promise, Mrs. Russell Marston called in her motor for Manuella, and Manuella had no hesitation in going. She had not the remotest intention of making any scene. Mrs. Russell Marston, whose own story will be written one day, wore beneath the most elaborate toilettes one of the warmest of human hearts. Behind the plumed and extravagant hats that no one but herself could have worn so successfully, but that suited her exotic beauty so well, was a fine and rare understanding. She knew all about Manuella and Alma Orilia now, and all her sympathy was with the girl. Musical London was talking about Harston Migotti and Alma Orilia. It was rumoured that Juan Orilia was on his way to England. Lulu thought it would be good that Manuella should show by her presence at the concert that the stories afloat had little foundation.

In the motor she questioned Manuella, but in a way that could not hurt her feelings.

"You wanted to hear her, did you not? You will be glad if she does justice to your husband's great music. Russell is delighted with it; he thinks she is going to make a big success with the song. I want you to applaud."

"I shall applaud if she sings well. It was good of you to invite me. Do people think I mind her singing the song because I sang it so badly myself? It isn't *my* song, as she says; it is Harston's. It put me in such a rage that Harston or anyone should think I could be jealous."

"I know," Lulu said soothingly. "I know; I want you to sit well in front, to be among the first to applaud." She took Manuella's hand, pressed it in her impulsive way. "You must come and dine with me one day, Russell wants to meet you. Don't mind what anybody says."

They were early in arriving at the Albert Hall, but already the house was very full.

"Russell will be pleased, he hates an empty house."

"He won't have that to-day."

The box was a large one and Lulu had the habit of entertaining her friends there. Among almost the first to arrive was Mr. Peter Graham. He had sent Manuella roses, and she and Harston were dining with him the next day.

Peter had arrived at an age when his emotions were his servants, and not his masters. His first and most *empressé* greetings were for Lulu, but, when he sat down, it was beside Manuella.

Other men crowded into the box. Lulu Marston was one of the most popular women in London. She enjoyed the perpetual devotion she received, and never overrated its quality. She could play the greatest pastmaster in flirtation to a standstill at his own game, and, never granting the last favour, could afford to be liberal with smaller ones. Under cover of Lulu's talk, Peter spoke low to Manuella. She thanked him for the flowers he had sent her. She had the most curious sense of expectation, as if it were drama at which she was assisting. Mr. Graham filled up the interval, he interested her no more than that. She had no idea she was being honoured by his attentions, that Lulu was stage-managing it. Harston Migotti could not neglect nor ignore his wife when she was under her protection and Peter Graham was in attendance. Lulu believed Peter was playing her game; she had no idea she was playing his when she asked him to come this afternoon. She thought Peter Graham was devoted to her. He was, but had been only awaiting the opportunity to see Manuella again. Now he talked to her in a low voice, and she heeded him as little as one heeds a curtain-raiser. And yet she had no idea what her expectancy portended.

The tuning of instruments, the rustle of music-sheets was over, the audience waiting. Then appeared the conductor. If Lulu Marston was a streak of vivid personality, what is to be said of Russell? He was electric; a breath went through the house when he raised his bâton,

a breath that seemed not to expire until he laid his bâton down again after the first number had been played, faced the audience, bowed, and smiled. He did not conduct the orchestra, he played with it, all the strings were in his hands, the souls of the musicians and the hearts of the audience were his instruments, and he drew from them exquisite harmony. When it was over, Manuella turned to Lulu, her eyes glowing.

"How wonderful he is!"

"Is this the first time you have heard Russell conduct?"

Peter Graham had not spoken; he had been quite content to lean back and watch her whilst she listened. Contour and colour were equally satisfying. He had wanted to see her in the daylight, and found she gained rather than lost by it; her eyes and lashes were glorious, the thin red curve of her vibrant mouth gave impetus to his imagination.

Perhaps if he had not been gazing at her just in that way, Lord Lyssons would again have put off his approach. Ever since Albert went away hurriedly, at his instigation, he had meant to see Manuella, to explain the circumstance. But he knew he would find it difficult to betray no feeling at their first meeting; so he procrastinated, hoping some accident would bring it about. He went wherever he thought she might go. When he saw the announcement that Alma Orilia would sing the song from *The Chariot Queen,* he got a seat for the concert, although music had always been a dead language to him, and, since she had married Migotti, it was not only dead, but decayed, and stank in his nostrils.

He saw Manuella come into the house, and kept his seat, watching, nevertheless, and in two minds as to whether he should go to her. But, when he noticed that Peter Graham watched her too, and the manner of his regard, he got up abruptly.

Manuella had gone out day after day expecting to meet him; she would look at every tall figure, feel the colour rising in her cheeks, her heart leaping, look away, and

then again, to find only disappointment. But to-day she did not expect to meet him, certainly not at the Albert Hall. Her heart nearly stopped when she heard his voice; then it raced on. No one else knew him.

"May I intrude?"

"Come in." Lulu welcomed him, but Manuella was rigid in her seat, presenting an obstinate back.

"I thought I recognized. . . ." there was a slight hesitation. . . . "Madame Migotti."

"She is here. Manuella. . . ."

She had to turn round then, but could not command her voice to speak, so she only bowed. And he was little less formal. Lulu's quick eyes saw beneath the greeting.

"Won't you sit down? I am sure Mr. Graham doesn't want to sit out the 'Eroica,' he must know every note of it. Mr. Graham. . . ." She waited for Manuella to name the new-comer.

"Lord Lyssons."

Waldo took Peter's gracefully-vacated chair. Russell's bâton was again uplifted. In this box, at least, no one would speak until the next piece was over.

Waldo sat through Beethoven's glorious symphony without moving. Manuella, in a chaos of emotion, was super-conscious of him. Not all Russell Marston's electricity or magnetism held her now. It seemed the longest piece to which she had ever listened; but, when it was over, it was as if it had only just begun. Still she could not turn round. Then Waldo said, quite easily, she thought, and with the old flippancy:

"It is so difficult to talk to your back."

When she faced him, although she was pale, he said:

"That's better. Don't you want to hear about Albert?"

"You might have let me know before."

"So I might."

"Why didn't you?"

"I wonder."

Their eyes met, and the blood rose in her cheeks; his

glass dropped out, and he had difficulty in replacing it.

"May I have my seat back? The next is the great song."

Peter had the air of a man of the world, the pleasant smile. Lord Lyssons yielded his place to him, standing up at the back of the box, however. As he was here, he thought he might stay, he must have another word with her.

The great moment had arrived, the moment when Alma Orilia was to sing the "Invocation" song from *The Chariot Queen,* and Manuella was to show she was not jealous, to lean forward and applaud. It seemed inconceivably unimportant. At first, until after the second verse had begun, she heard nothing, nothing but her own loud heart-beats; she was conscious of nothing but her fears lest Waldo, too, should hear them.

But the rest of the audience was more alive to the occasion.

Alma Orilia was as ill-dressed as most singers at afternoon concerts. She wore red silk, and the amplitude of her bust was accentuated by the badly-disposed lace with which the bodice was trimmed. Her hat was large, a lace brim shading her face; a big bird of paradise perched upon the side jarred upon the taste. She was so dark that it was difficult to believe she was of European blood. Amongst the audience who had no prejudice against paradise wings were men—and women, too—to whom even a suspicion of black blood is prejudicial to sympathy. Yet the first words of the first verse had not swung into the air before those who disliked dead birds as ornaments, and those who were prejudiced against the coloured races, were oblivious of both.

The song is now, of course, hackneyed, too well-known to need description, but the effect of it that afternoon, heard for the first time with the accompaniment, of a really fine orchestra, Russell Marston conducting, Alma Orilia singing, was little short of wonderful. These Sunday concert audiences are genuine musical connoisseurs, musical enthusiasts, but, above all things, musical

critics, difficult to move, not given to tumultuous applause; captious rather, and with classical cultivated taste, perhaps a little narrow. This was difficult music, torn from its context. But a difficulty to Russell Marston was always an inspiration. He was more than electrical, he was inspired. The great voice rolled, and the orchestra swayed with it, rising and falling.

Fear not, isle of blowing woodland, isle of silvery parapets,
Tho' the Roman eagle shadow thee, tho' the gathering enemy narrow thee,
Thou shalt wax and he shall dwindle, thou shalt be the mighty one yet!

Never, perhaps, at a Sunday concert at the Albert Hall had such applause been heard. Manuella had not to be prompted, although Lulu was prepared to remind her. She leaned forward, clapping with all her might in a flush of whole-hearted admiration that her generosity could not withhold. She might dislike the woman, but she had to admire the artist.

"You behaved splendidly, my dear, splendidly," Lulu told her enthusiastically. "Everyone could see there is nothing in the gossip." Lulu had a little lost her head or would not have been so outspoken. "No one applauded her more than you did."

A chorus of congratulations followed, charming things were said about Harston's music, Russell Marston's conducting, Alma Orilia's glorious voice. Lulu said it was impossible to stay for another number, it would be anti-climax. She was already standing up to go, collecting her bag, purse, muff, veil, talking to everyone at once.

"Are you coming?" she asked Manuella.

"What has there been gossip about?"

It was Waldo who asked it. Peter was finding her wrap, offering her his motor, criticizing the performance, trying to say the things that would please her.

"If she only looked Boadicea as well as she sang it," he said.

Manuella answered Waldo, hurriedly:

"About her, and my husband."

She did not know whether to accept Lulu Marston's offer, or Peter's. She really wanted to stay where she was, to sit out the remainder of the concert, keeping Waldo with her. But Peter was an adept at *petits soins;* he was holding her coat, everyone in the box was standing up:

"I'll get the motor round in a minute. . . ."

"If you are going in Madame Migotti's direction. . . ." There were half a dozen candidates for the honour of accompanying Lulu, and she was always in a hurry, full up with engagements.

"I think I would rather wait. . . . Harston may come up, he knows I am here," Manuella said irresolutely to Mr. Graham.

"I will send round and tell him, ask him to join us." Peter was never at fault.

But Harston might be seeing Alma Orilia home, and send her a humiliating message to that effect. The thought came quickly.

"No, don't do that. Perhaps I had better not wait."

Again Waldo interposed:

"Why not walk home?"

"Walk?" Peter was able to assure her that it was raining. He had no doubt she would prefer his society, and his motor, to that of this eccentric looking person whose clothes were so obviously of last year's cut, made by a second-rate tailor.

"I think I should like to walk."

"Perhaps you had better go in the motor. . . ."

Waldo was always unaccountable. Maybe he did not want her to get wet, but it was possible, too, that he was not, even now, in complete command of himself.

"I will call upon you if I may. . . ."

"Curious fellow, your friend," Peter Graham said, when they drove off together. He had got the car up quickly, handed her in, wrapped the furs carefully round her. "That was an idea of his! to walk home! Who is

he? I don't seem to remember having met him. Have you known him long?"

"He is the Earl of Lyssons. He is a friend of my brother's."

She did not know why she should say this, why she wished to explain, to be disingenuous.

He had asked if he might call upon her. All the way home she was wondering when he would come. Peter Graham had not even the reward of her attention in return for his pertinacity. But it was of little consequence, his vanity put her abstraction down to nervousness. There was no doubt, he thought, he was beginning to affect her; she could not talk to him with ease.

CHAPTER XXIV

SHE had not long to wait. Waldo came the very next day, almost before she expected him, though unconsciously she expected him every moment of the time. Quite early in the morning, a huge box of roses arrived, each rose pink and perfect on its long stem. She spent an hour arranging them in china vases, silver bowls and tall glasses. At four o'clock in the afternoon, when Lord Lyssons came, the little room was full of scent and colour. He seemed amazingly tall, and more like Don Quixote than ever. He saw that she still looked like a girl, although some quality had been added, some depth or tenderness. As yet he scarcely knew in what way she had altered, although he knew so well, as men do know these things, that he cared for her more than ever. Something Lulu Marston had said or suggested gave him the clue. If unhappiness lay in wait for her, she might have need of him. He had nothing now in his mind but that she was young and friendless, and her brother Albert away.

At first they talked only of Albert. If he was moved at seeing her no sign was apparent. His whimsical sententiousness, whatever the depth or intensity of his feelings, was not in abeyance, his sense of humour was never at fault. On the surface, at least, she was more nervous than he, talking quickly to hide it.

With abruptness she said:

"You are going to tell me about Albert. I can't make out why he didn't come and say good-bye? What made him decide so suddenly? Was he sent for?"

"Some people might express it that way. I suppose you've never heard of a judgment summons?"

"No."

"Well, Albert had."

"You mean he had been spending too much money?"

"You have guessed it at once, or nearly guessed it. May I sit down?"

"I am so sorry, he was so generous, more than generous to me. He furnished this house almost completely."

Waldo looked round him with interest, as if it were the first time he had seen the furniture. She went on:

"He always said he had nothing to do with it, pretended he didn't know where the things came from."

"Good by stealth sort of thing."

"Of course, I know he did not want to be thanked; he has been so good to me. Why didn't he tell me he was in trouble?"

"He told me."

"It wasn't anything, anything to do. . . . I mean, I know there was someone. . . ."

"There was certainly a lady in the case."

"Oh!"

"From whom I suggested an immediate separation."

"But perhaps she cared for him, Albert believed she cared for him." The vivid flush made him look the other way. But he need not have troubled, for she, too, had turned her head.

"She cared a good deal for his cheque-book, and a little for his prospects. I should not worry about her if I were you. I don't think her heart was broken, when they told her he had gone away."

"Did she try to prevent him? I suppose he said 'Good-bye' to her?"

"No! His lawyer did that; said it awfully well, I believe, and . . . inexpensively. That is enough about

Albert, isn't it? You've got a baby, haven't you? Why not produce him just, just to change the subject."

He had asked whether he might sit down, but he was again standing.

"It seems impossible you are married."

He stumbled on, it was difficult to be talking calmly to her. He saw now that she did not look happy, that was the chief alteration he found in her. Not maturity nor wisdom, but, lurking in her eyes' dark depths, was that which told him all was not well with her.

"Produce your offspring. I suppose he will have to have his pinafore taken off, and his hair brushed up. . . ."

She smiled for the first time since he had come.

"He doesn't wear a pinafore, and his hair curls naturally, it never has to be brushed up for company. I am going to fetch him myself. I shan't be two seconds; I'll bring him just as he is."

She was back before he had time to miss her, bearing the child in her arms. Waldo really liked babies, an unusual trait in a man; so he took him from her, and as he said, made a careful inspection. Any excuse served to conceal his feelings. The baby was not like his mother; he had Harston's big head and fair hair, Bertie's blue eyes. It was a curious experience to be dangling her child on his knee. To him she was still only a girl. If she had looked happy, if Lulu Marston had not let fall that unguarded word, if Mr. Peter Graham had not sat by her side with an unmistakable expression, he, Waldo, would have gone, never to come back; he would have stayed away from her at all costs. *If, if, if?* But he had sent Bertie to South Africa out of the *imbroglio* of his affairs. Someone must be here to stand by her.

The baby made itself at home on Waldo's knee, gurgled at the eye-glass, and made inefficient darts to possess himself of it. Waldo talked to him in his characteristic way. The incoherencies that passed for talk, and were the preliminary to it, the "mum mum" and "nan nan," encouraged his absurdities. Screwing his glass into his

eye, and looking down at the child seriously, Lord Lyssons said:

"I have no doubt there is not a word you are saying, young fellow, with which I'm not absolutely in agreement. You don't say it very well, but I think I grasp your meaning. You are jolly glad to be in the world at all, and you have made up your mind to laugh your way through it. If I poke at you with my finger you will laugh." The baby certainly did, and seemed to like the tickling. "If my glass drops out," which it had done during the tickling process, "you will laugh again, although I can't see half a yard before me without it. No! don't grab at it . . . it will hurt your little fingers. As for putting it in your mouth, it is not to be thought of. Here, take this, jamb my watch in your mouth; that won't hurt you. Gums hot, eh? Well, never mind, here's my finger; it's softer than the watch, but that's not saying much, is it? Bite down on it, that's good. He is pretty strong, isn't he?"

She offered once or twice to take the child from him, but he would not give it up. Harston talked a great deal about the baby, but never to it. He had written a *berceuse,* not dandled his son on his knee.

Into this picture of domesticity sailed Mrs. Oscar Des Vœux. Manuella had omitted to deny herself to visitors. She was not expecting anyone but Waldo, yet many came that afternoon. Mrs. Oscar Des Vœux almost shrieked at the sight of the baby, and begged that he might be sent away at once.

"I have the same idiosyncrasy about children that Lord Roberts has about cats. I simply cannot bear them in the room with me."

She seemed quite proud of it, and Waldo sympathetically interested himself in her symptoms, after Manuella introduced them, asking for details. But this occupied Mrs. Des Vœux for a comparatively short time. What she had come for was to find out how Manuella had borne Alma's triumph of yesterday, what she thought of it.

"It must have been hard for you to hear what another woman could do with the song."

"It wasn't hard at all." Manuella was surprised at that view of it. "I only wish I could have sung it as she did; but, of course, I couldn't, and I am glad Harston has found someone who can."

"Oh, my dear, it is all very well to carry it off like that, and, of course, it is very brave of you; I daresay I should have done the same thing myself. But everybody is talking about them. . . . I suppose you have heard about it?" she asked Waldo.

"No," he answered laconically, and Manuella flushed angrily.

"There is nothing for Lord Lyssons to hear."

"*Nothing!* Well, I'm sure I don't know what *you* call nothing. My husband is fearfully upset; you know she has left us and taken a flat. I told her I really couldn't have him in Harley Street from morning till night. I hear he is never out of the flat."

"I don't want to hear. . . ."

"I can quite understand that. But I thought if we put our heads together. . . ."

Waldo tried to create a diversion, but Mrs. Des Vœux would talk of nothing but the growing scandal of Harston Migotti's devotion to Alma Orilia.

"Not that that is the way I should have put it myself. For my part, I should say the boot is just as much, or more, on the other leg."

"Extraordinary!" interpolated Waldo.

"I beg your pardon."

"I was only thinking what an extraordinary position that must have been for the boot, to be just as much or more. . . ."

Mrs. Des Vœux could not understand his treating the matter so lightly.

"She runs after him, I mean," she explained. "Of course, in a way, it's all for his advantage. Not that Juan is likely to put up with it. Juan lets her do what she likes, up to a point. . . ."

Manuella could not bear that Waldo should hear her husband was neglecting her and running after another

woman. But Mrs. Des Vœux would talk of nothing else, commiserating her, saying she had been warned, advising her what to do. Waldo made no attempt to go, although now Manuella wished he would.

Gerald, always at home in the house, although no longer staying there, arrived in the midst of it. Mrs. Des Vœux's indiscretion included him, and he was understood to say something about the artistic temperament. He had rushed up in a taxi to find Harston, and when he heard he was not there, and had not been home since ten in the morning, he left again immediately. "I'll be bound he knows where to find him," Mrs. Des Vœux said, with her shrill laugh, getting up to go. Manuella asked her if she wanted a cab sent for.

"Oh, my dear, no. I don't trust myself to chance in this neighbourhood, I kept mine. Then I'm to tell Oscar you won't do anything; you are quite satisfied they should be the talk of the town?"

She was scarcely out of the house, Waldo had hardly had time to ask who was the Tommy Traddles who popped in and went out again, before there was another interruption.

Manuella was explaining:

"It was Gerald Streatfield, Harston's great friend; they play together; he copies the scores, helps in all sorts of ways."

"I suppose it was he who sent you all those roses."

"Who? Gerald? Oh, no! They came from Mr. Graham."

It was the very moment the servant announced:

"Mr. Graham."

Peter came in, most perfectly dressed in morning coat and grey trousers, grey tie, suède gloves.

"I have only rushed in for a moment."

Waldo, Manuella herself, thought he, too, would say something about Harston and Alma Orilia. He bowed over her hand, kissed it. That slight roll in his r's excused his manners, which were too good, just as his

movements were too graceful, and his clothes too decorative, for a well-bred Englishman.

"I found myself in the neighbourhood, I hope you do not mind. It is about to-morrow night. I want to know if your husband would care to play. I don't want to ask him formally. . . ."

"Harston is not at home."

She made him welcome—too welcome, Waldo thought. But all these roses were from him, and it was the second time he had sent her flowers. He had "r-rushed" in for a moment, but he stayed quite ten minutes, thoroughly charming, telling them the guests he was expecting to-morrow night.

"If you would care to join us, I should be very pleased. I don't know if you care for music?"

Manuella was surprised when Waldo, after an imperceptible moment of hesitation, accepted the invitation.

"I shall be delighted."

She, at least, knew he was not musical.

Peter Graham apologized for asking him only for the evening, not for dinner.

"My house is small. . . ." He apologized for the smallness of his house. When he went away he again kissed Manuella's hand, said how he was looking forward to seeing her, and that she need not trouble to let him know whether her husband would play or not.

When the door closed behind him, Waldo, still maintaining his place on the hearthrug, asked her if she expected many more visitors.

"You have quite a lot of nice new friends. . . ."

"Mrs. Des Vœux isn't a friend of mine."

After that he was silent, silent quite a long time. Manuella was afraid he would begin to speak about Alma and Harston. She would tell him that she did not care; she would not have him pity her. But, of course, Lord Lyssons did nothing of the sort. He stood with his back to the fire and warmed his coat-tails. When he spoke it was of the weather.

"It is perfectly ridiculous to have a fire on such a hot day."

"Well, there's nothing to make you stand before it."

"I am protecting you from its heat."

"I don't want protecting."

"No, no; of course not." He seemed a little abstracted.

"Nice fellow, Peter Graham," he began again. "Sympathetic manner. Does he always kiss your hand and send you flowers? You were always fond of flowers, I remember."

"Always."

She remembered how well she had been kept supplied—the rare orchids, and afterwards, when she had expressed a preference, the great pink peonies. From that day to this no one had sent her flowers. "No one has sent me flowers since then," she said involuntarily.

What he wanted to answer was that no one but himself should send her flowers. What he actually said was:

"Well, now he has begun, he will go on. You have only to tell him you like it, I am sure. Graham is sure to do the right thing; I should think he knows the game backwards."

"I don't know what you mean."

"Of course you don't; how should you?" And then, inconsequently, he continued:

"You know that kid of yours ought to have something to cut his grinders on. I'd better see about it for you. What's the little beggar's name? I ought to have been his godfather."

"He hasn't been christened. We always call him baby. I meant to ask Albert." She was a little confused, as if she had been guilty of carelessness, but, in reality, Harston was the culprit. The christening had been put off again and again, in order that his work should be uninterrupted.

"He is registered Albert."

"Well, call him Albert Waldo. Why not? I should like to have an interest in him."

He went away soon after that. He had not said one word to her of all he had in his head. He thought she might need a friend, and he wanted her to know he would be that friend. Not only to her, but also to her child. He was so filled with tenderness for her, and fear, that he had not a word to say. For it was obvious to him that her husband was engrossed with another woman, and that this man, Graham, at least, was ready to rush into the breach. He would have to wait until he was more used to seeing her before he could tell her anything. Now he only wanted to tell her that he was her friend, that she was to trust to him. He knew she did not want him to speak to her about her husband, to know she was being neglected, and gossiped about. Her pride and her sensitiveness were known to him, as well as her impulsiveness and capacity for folly. He did not mean to let her out of his sight again; but for the moment speech was paralysed in him.

CHAPTER XXV

SINCE Waldo was to be at Peter Graham's party, it was for Waldo Manuella dressed. She had the talent of clothes; Peter Graham appreciated it in her; it was part of her attraction for him.

To-night the pliant satin fell in long, graceful lines; the lace crossed transparently over the pale perfection of her shoulders, revealing the slender throat and suggesting the small rounded breasts. Her hair was without ornament, coiled low and simply on her small and regal head.

When she entered the drawing-room in Hertford Street, her host experienced a genuine emotion. He advanced to meet her, and showed at once that she was the guest of the evening, although there might be others more celebrated. It was a small party; she had hardly time to recognize faces she had seen in illustrated papers when dinner was announced.

In the beautiful small dining-room, at the round table, with its exquisite napery, old glass and Queen Anne silver, she became aware that her neighbour was a Cabinet Minister, and her *vis-à-vis* the most famous and popular lawyer who had ever followed a forensic by a parliamentary success. The newest and most defensible of peers was at the other end of the table. There were only twelve guests at the dinner-table, and none of them was unknown.

The dinner was quite short; Manuella was without the experience to know how exquisitely it was thought out and served, or how carefully selected were the wines. But she could not escape knowing that the setting had been prepared for her. For she was seated at the right hand of her host and his eyes and words were eloquent. Of course, she enjoyed this attention; she was young and beautiful to-night, glowing with expectancy. She had forgotten for the moment that Harston's conduct with Alma Orilia was exposing her to insulting sympathy. Her host's eyes told her she was looking well, if her glass had not told it her before. And it was so Waldo would see her.

Peter Graham had built his own house, and, like everything he did, it showed evidence of an exquisite taste. The music-room led out of the dining-room, although it was on a lower level. It was approached by steps from a balcony, and on the balcony Manuella stood by her host's side whilst he was receiving his guests. The long room below was sombre and dignified, with panelling of cedar-wood and silver, lit by electric lights. There were deep recesses in the walls, where, on shelves, behind reticulated glass, on velvet cushions, she could dimly see the great collection of musical stringed instruments he told her he had spent the best part of his life in getting together. Here were the masterpieces of Stradivarius, Guanarius and Amati; the viols and violas de Gamba. Peter Graham's evening guests were as distinguished as this small perfect music-room on which they were looking down, and all the house, which he promised to show her presently. But there was only one to whose coming she looked forward.

Waldo was very late; at one time she thought he would not come at all. It was not until the evening was far advanced, and she had left the balcony, and was with the other guests in the music-room, that she became aware he was present. The moment was inauspicious. Alma Orilia was on the platform, and Harston at the piano. She was supremely conscious of comment. Had

she not been, her host's apology would have made her so.

"I wish I had not asked her to-night. I did so want you to be perfectly happy in my house, to be able to look back to this evening. . . ."

Waldo did not make his way to her side immediately. By the time he came the song was over, and Harston had disappeared with the singer.

"I am so sorry," Mr. Graham began again.

"There is not the least occasion. . . ." He had to leave her with the sentence unfinished to greet some fresh arrival.

Waldo sauntered up; he cannot be said to have shown any alacrity. It was either his leisureliness or because Mr. Graham had thought it necessary to express his regret, that sent her spirits down.

"You like this sort of thing?" Waldo asked.

"We lived a very quiet life when we were first married," she answered evasively.

"Oh, yes."

He knew all about that quiet life from Albert. And now the man, the man to whom she had sacrificed herself, for whom she had worked, was openly neglecting her for another woman. He would have given anything to have been able to ask her if she was hurt, if he could not comfort her. He did, of course, nothing of the sort. After a few seconds' silence he said:

"And how is my young godson? Did he get those corals I sent him up?"

"*And* the teething band, *and* the baby comforter? Yes, they all came, and I meant to write and thank you. But I knew I was going to meet you here to-night."

"Were you glad?" the words escaped him. "As if you could say you were not!" he finished.

"I don't know."

That curious pain she had so long ago, and had almost forgotten, the pain which only Waldo had ever given her, was stirring within her like a couchant animal waking. In consciousness of it, and her shyness, she turned gladly to her host, again by her side.

"You won't care about the next number. I want to show you my prints. Will you come?"

She went upstairs with him, through the dining-room again, across the hall to the morning-room. They were quite alone there, and now she was talking gaily, easily. To anyone but Waldo she could talk easily. She excited Peter Graham's imagination; he had meant the evening to be momentous, and now he thought it might be even more momentous than he had dared to hope. He could not gauge the instability of her mood, any more than he could know what provoked it. He only knew she was glad to come away with him.

"You collect prints as well as musical instruments?" she looked round her with admiration.

They were alone in a room that was little more than a cabinet of old colour-prints. Hung low and crowded on the panelled walls, they were appropriate with the Chelsea china, chintz curtains, Chippendale furniture. She exclaimed at the charm of the scheme, and he drew her attention to one or two of the gems of the collection.

"You see so quickly, so wonderfully," he said.

"Do I? I know I am awfully ignorant. But the whole room seems so right, so harmonious. Why is one so much happier in the right surroundings?"

"You feel happy here?" He wondered if she meant it for an opening. Yesterday he thought she had read no page in the grammar of philandering. To-night he was beginning to believe she could write verses in the language; little wonder his pulses began to throb.

"You feel happy here; with me?"

"And the prints."

"Don't laugh at me," he said in a lower voice.

"I was not laughing."

"You don't know what it is to me to see you here, among the things I love. . . ."

Peter saw the path before him quite clearly; he had traversed it so many times. Never, of course, with such a companion. The last was always the only one with Peter Graham. He began at the beginning:

"Don't you feel that in some way we are *en rapport?*" His blurred r's made the speech's effect. "That we have the same tastes? Have you also that sudden indefinable feeling of intimacy, as if we had known each other a long time?"

She hesitated, she said she was not sure if she felt intimate with him; blushed when she said it. It had only been for a moment she had been an advanced scholar, written verses in the new language he was teaching her; now she was a tyro again, unsophisticated. He loved teaching. He played the violin, but it was only in illicit love he was a master. And he guarded his own emotions, nursing them until they were so delicate that every word fluttered them.

Manuella's experience in being made love to was exceedingly limited. Harston was but an impetuous amateur, and Lord Lyssons even less gifted. Now she was in the hands of a master. At dinner she had been conscious that he thought her beautiful; now he made her aware that she was full of undiscovered possibilities, unrevealed charms. He went easily from that to her husband's infatuation for the singer, or of the singer for him. His delicacy in approaching the matter at all was only exceeded by his tact in conveying sympathy without actually opening the subject.

"You must not let it distress you. If you cared, if you authorized me, I would write to her husband, to Juan Orilia . . . though, of course, you can hold your own without anybody's help. But if they *should* take any step . . . inimical . . . inimical to your interests. . . ."

He was telling her that she had a friend in him. She was quickly responsive to kindness, and thanked him impulsively.

"I don't really care, only I hate people discussing me." She denied and acknowledged in a breath.

"I understand; I quite understand."

Waldo, who had missed them, interrupted most unexpectedly, walking into the room as if it were natural

for him to be there. He saw that she was agitated, and mistook the cause.

"And this is the famous collection of prints?"

If Peter Graham was surprised to find they were no longer alone, he had the talent to disguise it. He greeted Lord Lyssons warmly, as if he had no other aim than to show the engravings.

"You are interested in prints? I have one of your great-grandmother by Bartolozzi in colours, after Kauffmann; and first states of both the Sir Joshuas." He reminded Manuella: "You admired them very much." Manuella was silent now, the manner of a few moments ago completely changed. A man would have been a fool not to have noticed the change in her, and Peter Graham was not exactly a fool. Peter thought Manuella was resenting Lord Lyssons's intrusion, which, however, he attributed to a genuine enthusiasm for prints.

"The fourth Countess of Lyssons was accounted a great beauty in her day, and all the fashionable portrait painters tried their hands on her. I have the mezzotint by John Jones after Romney."

"The beauty has not proved hereditary."

Peter Graham's wit was not quick.

"Oh! I don't know. Lady Carruthers is a cousin of yours, isn't she? She was a very lovely woman. I knew her daughter."

Waldo said he was fortunate.

"If you will accept a print from me, I have also a second state of the Jones mezzotint which is practically equal to the first. It is very rare in either state, and is not described by Chaloner Smith. I was going to give it to the British Museum, as they haven't a copy, but if you——"

Peter Graham knew all about his own collection, which distinguished him from the majority of wealthy collectors. Lord Lyssons expressed his gratitude suitably but declined the print.

"I'm afraid I must go now."

Peter Graham had his reputation as a host to sustain.

Lord Lyssons seemed absorbed in the walls, as if he would linger over them. "You will excuse me; I see you are an enthusiast. I wish I could remain with you. There is a catalogue."

When he had left the room Lord Lyssons said to Manuella:

"I did not know you took such an interest in prints."

"Nor I that you did," she answered hastily.

"You seemed to have got quite excited over them." He was eyeing her curiously.

"It was not about the prints."

"I imagined not."

Mr. Graham hurried back to tell them supper was served. "I had no idea it was so late. Will you bring Mrs. Migotti to the supper-room?"

He remembered now that it was in her sitting-room he had met Lord Lyssons; the fellow was unattractive, ill-dressed, still . . . there was no use pressing a *tête-à-tête* on her.

"There is a seat reserved for Madame Migotti at the top of the table. I will be there almost as soon as you are. Prince Kapotsky is just going, I must see him off."

"Are you hungry?" Waldo asked Manuella, when Mr. Graham hurried away again.

"Starving."

"Come along, then."

That is what it was, hunger of the heart. If both of them were conscious of it, were they both in hopes of keeping it from the other. They were very silent, seeming to have nothing to say as they went into the supper-room.

She sat silently, too, through supper, and Peter Graham, again beside her, thought again that his words and himself had affected her, and was well satisfied. He had eyes for no one but her, his deferential manner made her conspicuous.

Lord Lyssons was not a man of strong prejudices; he had travelled too much, and seen too many people. But,

watching them both, he allowed a hard word or two to escape him.

"These damned Jews," he said to himself, "they can buy the earth!"

And then he was ashamed again, for Manuella was not to be bought. That she was to be wooed he hardly believed; that she had to be protected he instinctively knew. He suspected it at Albert Hall, and to-night he knew. Their host was making little secret of his feelings, Harston Migotti was inseparable from Alma Orilia. Lord Lyssons heard Harston say hurriedly to his wife, after supper was over and the guests dispersing:

"Don't wait for me. Alma wants me to see her home. . . ."

He was perhaps a little ashamed, repeating a lesson. Alma had sent him to say it, and was watching the effect. She looked insolently triumphant. In some things Peter was quicker than Waldo, and he knew women better, women like Alma Orilia.

"I am hoping Madame Migotti will not leave us just yet," he said to Harston. "You can rely upon me to see her into the motor. I told it to come back for her."

"Graham will look after her." That was what Harston reported to his exacting mistress.

And when the time came, Peter was better than his word. He would not let her go up to the cloak-room, but sent for her wraps, seeing her afterwards to the car, staying at the door of it bareheaded, talking earnestly.

When Waldo was being helped into his own coat in the hall he heard a laughing comment on his attention:

"Peter never alters. Co-respondents are born, not made. He has got hold of a beauty this time. Lucky fellow!"

CHAPTER XXVI

TWO days later, at twelve o'clock in the morning, Peter Graham was in the sitting-room at Circus Road, extraordinarily pale and agitated, and Manuella was standing listening to him, little less pale than he. Her lips were trembling, her eyes startled, and she was at first incredulous.

"That I should be the one to bring you such news!" he ejaculated.

"You say Madame Orilia told you herself that they were going away together?"

"Her words were, 'You can tell her that we have left for Genoa.'"

"Had anything happened? Was there any reason why she should have sent me such a message, and sent it by you?"

He hesitated.

"I happened to be in the Buckingham Palace Road. She pulled down the window of her brougham and called to me. . . ."

"I want to know exactly what she said. Was Harston with her?"

"Yes; he was beside her. She said, 'Go and tell her we have gone.' It seems, that night at my house, someone heard you say Alma Orilia might sing your husband's music, but . . . What you said was repeated to her. She is revengeful, bitter. . . ."

"What I said was that she was quite welcome to sing his music and even to make love to him, but that she would never get any further; she was too ugly to be wicked."

A sort of dry sob escaped her as she repeated her own words, it was true she had said them, and to Mrs. Des Vœux.

"She got it into her head you despised her as a rival, thought because she was plain. . . ."

"Ugly!"

"Because she was ugly, you would be able to hold him, keep him . . . I don't know what she thought; she was jealous of you, furious you were not jealous of her. I don't think he wanted to go; he looked miserable. 'Tell Manuella,' he said, 'tell her I will come back. . . .'"

"How dare he? how dare he? I won't have him back!"

"I am sure everything was decided hurriedly. He explained it to me as well as he was able. Stollmont is to be at Genoa on Saturday; they want to catch him there. If they can see him before he makes any other arrangements they may get him to put on *Il Traditore* before anything else."

"Harston wanted to make me believe they have only gone to see Stollmont?"

"He said the letter only came this morning . . . he had not heard of it before he went out. He sent young Streatfield up for his clothes, didn't he?"

"Yes. Gerald told me he was called away on business."

"She won't be able to hold him; how would it be possible after . . . after you? Tell me what I can do to help you. You ought to get away, not wait until people come."

"To condole with me?" She was almost beyond speech with her contempt and indignation, the hurt to her pride.

"Everybody will be sorry for you and condemn him. She will have done herself no good. I believe her husband said he would kill her the next time it happened."

She sat down suddenly on the sofa, her courage collapsing. Peter Graham began half a dozen sentences without finishing them; they seemed to have in them more r's than any other letter. He, too, was obviously labouring under deep emotion. Through her own fury she became conscious of it, and supposed he was sorry for her. The other night he had said there was something in common between them, and he had shown his interest in her. He came over now and sat beside her.

"You know how distressed I am." She saw that there were even tears in his eyes, she spoke hurriedly when she saw them.

"I know."

Not grief, but anger, held her; she knew she had kept her vows, been a good wife, lived in repression, thought of nothing but her husband.

"How can I help it? To see you so beautiful, and . . . and wronged. . . ."

He took her hand, held it to his lips. She forgot he was there. Harston had left her! And with that woman!

She went very pale, and he thought she was going to faint. *"What would Waldo say?"* That was the sudden thought that paled her cheek.

Peter Graham was sitting very close to her, and she could not bear him so near.

"I wish you would get up." He rose at once.

"Shall I go?"

There was silence again in the room, the clock ticked, a cinder from the fire dropped into the grate. Again a sudden passion of resentment seized her, a quick impulse of ungovernable anger, it died down, however, as quickly as it came.

"You don't mind me saying that I think you should get away," Peter Graham went on: "The news will be all over London by to-night. Then the comments, the sympathy; newspaper paragraphs perhaps. . . ."

"How can I get away?"

"Let me think."

He seemed to be thinking.

"It is impossible for me to go away."

"You will have them all up here, questioning, condoling. It will be unbearable for you."

She, too, was thinking how unbearable sympathy would be.

"Oscar will want you to do nothing. His wife will urge you to take proceedings. . . ."

"I shan't do anything she advises; she will gloat over it, talk to everyone. . . ."

"You must get away."

Now he spoke with decision.

"That is the only possible thing. Why not go South?" It seemed an inspiration, as if it had come to him suddenly.

"I am not going myself this year," he hurried on. "I cannot leave London. Take my villa, I have a little villa between Monte Carlo and Mentone. . . ."

He painted its deficiencies, deprecated, whilst describing, the charms of its isolation. It was in a garden, yellow with lemon-trees and mimosa, hanging over the blue tideless sea.

"I will lend it you, if you will allow me, or let it to you. You will be quite alone there, and can make up your mind at leisure what you are going to do. There is no sunnier spot in the world, but there is always shade in the garden and on the verandah. It is very quiet, out of the sound and sight of tramcars and motors—practically on a promontory."

She had told him to go away, but now in the eagerness of his speech he came over to her again.

"You don't know how I should like to feel I could be of use to you." He spoke emotionally.

"I know."

She believed that he liked her and therefore offered her this sign of friendship, that he understood it would be impossible for her to stay here to be sympathized with, to bear the comments and curiosity of their friends. In her eyes he was almost elderly, at the age of friendship.

She did not mean to accept his offer, or rather she was not sure what to do. So much would depend upon Waldo. . . . When she thought of what Waldo would say or do she flushed again and Peter Graham interpreted the flush in his own way. He was already beginning to thank her fervidly when Lord Lyssons was announced. No one could have guessed Waldo's sensations on seeing Peter Graham here, traces of emotion in his face, storm of emotion in hers.

All he said was:

"Hope I don't intrude?"

Peter answered hurriedly:

"I am just going," and made his escape, imagining he had achieved all his purpose.

Manuella followed him to the door, saying something in a low voice.

Waldo remained standing on the hearthrug, his back to the fire, pulling himself together. He phrased it to himself:

"Pull yourself together, old man; that damned Jew has got hold of her in some way, appealing to her feelings. You have got to look after her; don't go thinking for yourself, and how you'd like to wring his neck; say the right thing for once."

What Manuella had whispered to Peter Graham was:

"Don't say anything before Lord Lyssons."

It was only an impulse, but if he had not already heard, she wanted to tell him herself, and when they were by themselves. In the hall she thanked Graham for coming to her, and for the offer of his villa. She was touched by the way in which he responded that he had done nothing, and wished he could do everything.

When she came back to Waldo she was still convinced of Graham's kindness, but it had become of little moment. What would happen when she told Lord Lyssons that her husband had deserted her? How was she going to tell him?

She came back into the room with these two questions paramount. For the moment she forgot to be angry

with Harston, contemptuous of Alma Orilia. What would Waldo say? That was the beginning and end.

What Waldo said was:

"Have you really been able to part with him? Awful wrench, I suppose. Sweet fellow! isn't he? I would not have interrupted for anything if I had known. May I have a cigarette?"

She was quite taken aback by his manner, quickly in arms against it.

"Of course you can smoke. Mr. Graham only came . . . only came to tell me. . . ."

"Oh! I can guess what he came to tell you. Where do you keep your matches?" He was searching the mantelpiece. She found the box on the table and handed it to him.

"Thanks, fine cigarettes, these Lucanas. I suppose Mr. Graham does not smoke; that sort of fellow never does."

"Why are you talking like that about Mr. Graham? He is the kindest man in the world; he only came up here this morning, because—because. . . ."

"I say, spare me what he came up here this morning for; I came up myself for the same reason."

He meant they had both come to see her. But what she thought he meant was that he, too, had heard—heard that Harston had left England with Alma Orilia! She waited for his next words—hung upon them. His sympathy would be sweet, but from him she wanted more than sympathy. He went on smoking; found the cigarette was not so much to his liking as he thought, although that may not have been the fault of the cigarette, made another observation about it, and then pitched it into the fire.

"I suppose he imagines himself in love with you."

She stared at him in utter surprise, speechless.

"Who? What?"

"He has probably a lascivious and beastly imagination. You are impulsive and practically unprotected. . . ."

The he *did* know.

"Practically unprotected," he repeated. "Albert isn't here, although, of course, he ought to be."

"I don't want Albert. I don't want anybody."

"You have never been able to take care of yourself. You are like a child playing with matches; you don't know your danger."

Her nerves were fretted, fretted almost to breaking-point. What she had wanted and expected from him was . . . was . . . she did not word it, but "comforting" was the word. Instead, he was blaming her because Harston had left her, because she had been unable to take care of him or of herself. She had never been able to bear injustice; her hot heart swelled in resentment.

"It isn't true. I have taken care of myself and of him too."

She was speaking of Harston. He was thinking of Peter Graham, whom he had found there at twelve o'clock in the morning, the signs of spent emotion in his pallor and dark eyes reflected in hers.

"For the moment, I daresay."

For all his cool words and manner Waldo was hardly less agitated than she. "I suppose he has only left you for a time. I know the kind of fellow he is."

"He is not coming back at all."

"Don't you believe it. He will make an appeal to you; I shouldn't wonder if he wept. You are as soft as a lobster without its shell. I shall find you drying his tears. . . ."

"I shall do what I think right."

"You have the heart of a child and the knowledge of the world of a field-mouse. . . ."

"I wish you had not come here at all," she burst out, bitterly and utterly disappointed and unnerved.

"Of course you do."

He was labouring under an excess of feeling, accompanied by an utter incapacity to express it. That Peter Graham should be making love to her was an unspeakable outrage; that she should defend him, be his advocate, was intolerable. In the misunderstanding, both of them

lost their temper, and said absurd things. What they were he was never quite sure, nor was she. There was something about "orientalism" that she did not in the least understand but resented the more passionately, and more about her childishness.

"You only came here to say unkind things to me."

He did not know anything about the trouble she was in, of Harston's defection or her sensitiveness about it. "You are trying to make me lose my temper."

"Well, it has never been a difficult job, has it?"

She burst into tears and went on incoherently to upbraid him for what he had said and left unsaid. The storm of her anger played about him like forked lightning. He seemed to see in its flashes the justification for the jealousy that was shaking him.

She rushed out of the room when her fury had abated, and he waited a long time for her to come back. But when she did not come back he went away. He was not surprised that she was angry with him for having pointed out that Peter Graham was making love to her; when he thought it over he was rather glad. To him she was so much more than beautiful or attractive. He saw her young soul white behind her lovely eyes, and that all her spirit shone. He knew her loyalty and courage, the fearlessness with which she would face danger. He had but meant to warn her.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE full force of her loneliness broke upon her that afternoon, when Waldo had left her without a word of comfort, and she had nothing to do but think. She sat over the fire and thought about her life. From beginning to end it had been a failure; she thought it would have been far better had she died with her mother. Her cruel childhood came back to her, her stepmother's dislike, her father's indifference, her own fits of temper. Perhaps it was true, too, that she had had a bad influence on Albert. There was nothing good or strong about him, and he had left England under a cloud. She began to cry presently, thinking how alone she was—what a muddle she had made of everything.

She went up into the nursery later, and carried the baby off to take his first sleep in her arms, unheeding the nurse's remonstrances.

If he cuddled down with his curly head against her heart, she might find solace. But baby, too, disappointed her this evening. He had a slight cold and was fidgety; perhaps he missed his bed. She took him back to nurse, feeling cross with him, as she had been with Waldo. But already she was sorry she had lost her temper with Waldo, and was wondering if indeed he knew, if he understood.

How long the evening seemed! And all her days,

she supposed, would be the same. She could settle neither to needlework nor to reading. Were all her days and evenings to be like this? It was not true that it was her own fault, and that she could not take care of herself. She had taken care not only of herself, but of Harston, been a good wife to him; prayed for help, subordinated herself, her baby, everything, to his well-being. That he had left her like this was a punishment, nevertheless; a punishment, because, notwithstanding all that she had done, she had not loved him; he must have realized some lack in her. She went to bed early, feeling very forlorn, crying herself to sleep. Her last thought was that, when her stepmother heard of her position, she would exclaim with satisfaction: "I always said no one would live in the same house with her."

She did not know how long she had been asleep, but she woke with a start.

"Oh, ma'am, do wake! do come! Oh, ma'am, he's so bad. . . ."

She was out of bed in a second, her heart thumping.

"I'm coming. What is it? Wait!"

She was at the door in her nightgown, not staying to put on a dressing-gown, get her slippers, or turn up the light.

"What is it? what's the matter?"

"It's the croup, I think."

Now she was flying along the narrow passage. The nursery door was open; a night-light burned. Cook was sitting with the choking, struggling baby, a strange figure of a cook, fat and unwieldy in her cotton dress put on hastily, unbuttoned over her nightgown, a grey wisp of hair falling over her flaccid cheeks, but a good kind old cookie for all that, crying and distraught.

"It's the croup, that's what it is, the croup. Oh, the poor dear!"

In a moment Manuella had caught him up, and he was gasping and fighting for breath in his mummy's arms. She was questioning, exclaiming, crying with him. He could not get his breath, was almost black in the face.

She did not know what to do, none of them knew what to do. It was maddening to be so helpless.

"I've heard that a hot bath . . . get a hot bath."

"Or a sponge of hot water to the back of the neck . . ."

"For God's sake get a sponge."

"And there's ipecac. Poor dear! if he could bring it up, if we could get him to be sick. . . ."

They were doing all they knew. Nurse had called cook first; they had hesitated to send for mistress, "knowing she was in trouble." Manuella hated them for knowing it.

In any emergency the finer faculties emerge. There was now no memory of trouble save this. She knew little of illness, but mother-instinct guided her, and soon the bath was ready. The hot sponge proved valuable; a weak mixture of mustard and water served in place of the absent ipecacuanha. By the time cook had dressed hurriedly, and gone out to seek a doctor, his services were less urgently needed.

When she tardily returned with a sleepy and unwilling person retrieved from a neighbouring dispensary, baby was no longer nearly black in the face and struggling for breath; he was very white and exhausted, he seemed to have shrunk beyond recognition, to have fallen in at the temples and to be but a simulacrum of himself, but he was no longer engaged in that terrible fight. He was drowsy, inclined to sleep.

This local doctor in the stress of his own fight for a living had forgotten what little science he ever had. A man experienced in filling death-certificates, capable of vaccinating, or seeing a maternity case through if there should be no complications. "Never interfere with Nature," was his easy maxim. To do him justice, we must admit he rarely made the attempt. He hated coming out at night; nothing short of cookie's dynamic energy would have dragged him from his bed. But she rang and rang, and shouted up the tube that led to his bedroom. He was overtired with the many hours' work that he had done so perfunctorily; the work itself had

lost interest for him, so long had he prescribed the same formulæ, given the same medicines. It mattered so little from which cask he drew the ingredients. When the day's work was over he drank whisky and water hot, and slept heavily.

Now, here he was, a little fuddled, and coarsely jocular.

"You know my charge is ten shillings if I am called out of bed in the middle of the night," was the first greeting. When he was able to realize that it was not a club patient, but a lady who sat before him with an exhausted baby on her lap, he tried to pull himself together, to be of some use. He was not a villain, not even a drunkard, he was only tired and worn out from working under impossible conditions to make a living for his own wife and children. He approved all that had been done. But Manuella, realizing quickly what manner of doctor had been brought to her, would not let him approach the child for examination, lest he should disturb the quiet into which the little sufferer had fallen. Impetuously she bade him stay where he was.

Because she was so beautiful in the blue dressing-gown they had thrown round her, he was amenable, staring at her, hardly seeing the patient. From his safe distance he asked the history of the illness. Manuella, cuddling the boy, trying to answer the doctor's conventional questions, remembered how little heed she had paid to baby's fretting, or his symptoms of a cold. In her selfishness she had thought of nothing but her own troubles.

"I didn't notice; tell him, nurse. But it is over now, the attack has quite passed; he has fallen asleep. I won't have him awakened."

This dispensary doctor had rough methods.

"Another attack will be coming on again, when he has gathered the strength for it. From the look of him, he hasn't much stamina. . . ."

She looked up indignantly. "He has never had a day's illness."

"He may pull through, but it's always a toss-up with the first attack of croup. Twelve months old? Teething,

too, I suppose? There is nothing to be done. I'm sure I don't know why I was dragged out of bed. Nature, you know; you'll have to leave him to Nature. Keep hot water going; don't give him anything but milk."

He was really trying to remember all he knew about croup. He seemed to remember that the Madonna was fair; but in her blue dressing-gown this young woman looked like the Madonna. He could not classify her. His patients were mostly drawn from one of two classes, and she was not of either. He would know more if he saw her husband, a man is generally more easy to classify than a woman

"Where is your husband? What is he?"

There is not much time to be tactful or delicate in a dispensary practice.

"He ought to be here, you know."

Her heart ran cold when he had spoken of another attack. She held the child always closer in her arms, feeling his frailty, anguished lest he should be again convulsed.

"Her husband's abroad," answered cook to the doctor's question, whilst Manuella only held the child more closely, and thought wildly how she was to save him.

"Oh, abroad, is he?"

The doctor wondered whether she was married. He saw a good deal of irregular life in the course of his cheap practice. He was sorry for her, but it was three or four o'clock now, and he wanted his bed.

"Well, I shouldn't worry about him any more until it comes on. Put him back in his cot and cover him up. I'll send you round some medicine in the morning. I daresay I'll manage to see him in the course of the day."

He could never have imagined how she resented his staying there and everything he said, how anxious she was that he should be gone. She hated the man. This was no healer, no helper.

When the front door slammed behind him the sense of hurry came upon her—the need for immediate action. If it were true another attack was threatening she must

be ready to meet it. Her heart almost broke in tenderness over the baby.

"There must be something to be done, something that dreadful man doesn't know," she said desperately. It was now she wanted a friend's help. What did pride or anything matter? Waldo had said if she ever needed a friend she was to call upon him; she was desperate in her need. The baby started in her arms, cried, coughed.

"Go to the nearest telephone office. Find Lord Lyssons' number; he lives somewhere in the 'Albany.' Tell him baby is ill, and I want the name and address of that doctor he sent to me once. He must come quickly . . ." her voice broke.

That it was the doctor, and not Lord Lyssons, who was needed quickly, cookie might have misunderstood. She was very fat and had exhausted her intelligence on the hot water and mustard. She got her message through, not to Lord Lyssons, who at five in the morning was not yet awake, but to his sleepy valet, who delivered it mutilated, but fairly intelligible, an hour or two later. How exhaustively Waldo cursed that considerate valet goes without saying. He dressed in record time, and was thundering at Tom Shorter's door before that eminent physician was out of bed.

Meanwhile, back at home, cookie had the blinds up and fires going, the house in order, and breakfast on the way. Manuella was able to lay the child down, although reluctantly, whilst she dressed. She drank her coffee watching, her eyes on the cot, every sound or stir, almost every laboured uneven breath, bringing her heart to a standstill, driving the last faint colour from her face. Cook had got her message through to that little doctor who was a healer, but how long he was in coming—how long! Before he came she was agonized again with that choking cry and cough to which the baby awoke. She was quicker this time with her remedies, but could not but see how frail he had so suddenly grown, and shrunken about the temples, his eyes dull. She was holding him in his bath when they came in, but she was very near the

end of her own powers of endurance. The baby suffered, struggled, gasped for breath and choked; she found it unbearable to see him suffer.

The two men came together into the room. Dr. Shorter, without a moment's hesitation, took the child from her, lifting it out of the useless bath, wrapping it in the blanket, taking immediate charge.

" She's about at the end of her tether. You look after her," he said to Waldo. " Lay her on the floor quickly, she's going to faint."

He mastered the whole situation; all they had to do was to carry out his instructions, get the things for which he asked, constitute themselves his lay helpers. Manuella's attack of faintness lasted a very few seconds. The strain had suddenly become insupportable, the swaying room grew black before her eyes. The floor and the draught from the open door, with the knowledge that the child was in safe hands, revived her. She would have held on if the little doctor had not taken the baby from her arms. She said so, and afterwards Dr. Shorter told her it was probably true. In quite a few minutes the faintness had gone; she was up, and the readiest of his helpers. It was extraordinary how the little man brought calm with him, and confidence . . . if not confidence, at least hope.

Waldo went backwards and forwards to the chemist; the weakness had to be fought as well as the croup. All Tom Shorter's energies were in the fight now, for it came to a fight, a fight to the finish. He was not going to let the child go, but it needed all he knew, every feint and dodge to keep him here; probably no other man would have succeeded.

Waldo, going backwards and forwards to the chemist, backwards and forwards to the telephone, for they must know in Harley Street what it was detained the consultant from his full waiting-room, tried to keep Manuella's courage going. All his mind was in that small nursery, concentrated on the girl (she would always be a girl to him) with the tragic face, who was watching her dying

baby. He thought it was dying, although he kept telling her the contrary.

"You . . . you wouldn't like a parson?" he asked her, abruptly when Tom Shorter gave the first injection of strychnine, the oxygen beginning to fail of effect.

For the moment she failed to grasp his meaning, looking at him with those sombre, unseeing eyes. He went on hurriedly: "I don't know how you feel about it, it can't do any harm. He . . . he hasn't been christened, you know . . ."

She tried to collect her thoughts.

"I think I had better fetch one. Shall I? It can't do any harm."

If she found the baby's sufferings insupportable, he was feeling hers no less acutely. He did not know what to say, and none of the hesitant words that came to him were the words he wanted.

He wanted to ask Tom Shorter whether it would not be as well to have the baby christened at once, but he could not speak to him without Manuella hearing. He lowered his voice as much as possible.

Dr. Shorter had no opinion of religious ceremonies, and shared the average scientist's neglect of observances, but his reply was quite unhesitating:

"You will have to hurry."

The paroxysms of coughing were under control, the forehead sweating; the child retained the injected nourishment. But it was blue about the lips, the extremities were cold; no one but Tom Shorter would have held on to his work.

Lord Lyssons was quicker and more successful with a clergyman than cook had been with a doctor. The athletic curate he captured was eager for his job, and hardly waited to hear it explained.

"Christen a dying baby? Certainly. Half a jiff! Can you wait until I change my clothes?" He had been training a local division of the Boy Scouts when Waldo encountered him, and was hurrying home.

"I'm afraid there's no time to be lost."

The athletic curate was as reverent in his flannels as he would have been in black. The brief ceremony lost nothing in his reading. It was not a new scene for him—the dying child, the half-unconscious mother, even the little doctor, who said, under his breath: "Cut it as short as you can, and don't stand where I can't watch him." When he had baptized the baby he said to Waldo:

"May I say the prayers for the dying?" Before he had been answered he was down on his knees. Then Waldo moved over and stood by Manuella. "It can't do any harm," he said again apologetically.

It was strange to see him kneeling too, presently, side by side with the young clergyman. She had no stubbornness of unfaith to conquer, only indifference, and after a moment's hesitation she knelt with them.

There was silence in the disordered nursery—no sound now but the fervent prayer. Dr. Shorter thought, perhaps a little contemptuously, that it might have been a scene out of a novel by Hall Caine. During the prayer he sterilized the tube and prepared another injection. He never doubted it was that last injection, and not the prayer, that brought the pulse back and set the heart beating again. The young clergyman said a word of sympathy to Manuella, who seemed as if she had not heard, and Lyssons followed him out of the room, returning quickly.

"Seen him off the premises? Now just keep absolutely quiet for five minutes if you can." But the five minutes were not up, and Manuella had not stirred, when he said, in a voice of triumph: "Come over here."

It was to Manuella the doctor spoke, and she obeyed him quickly. "Put your finger there, on his pulse. What do you think of that? He has come back, he'll pull through now. Another minute and he'll open his eyes. . . . Good Heavens! what's the woman crying for?"

She broke down then, but not until afterwards did she

know Waldo's arms were about her, and that it was on his shoulder she was crying.

Tom Shorter was so proud of what he had achieved that he wanted an audience. That was his fault, if he had a fault. After he had fought death at close quarters, such close quarters as this had been, and won his battle, he was apt to look round the arena for applause. Waldo would have applauded, but he had his arms about Manuella.

"Oh! my sweet, don't cry. I'm holding you; it is all right, the little chap is going to stay with us." He hardly knew whether he said the words or thought them. "Thank God you sent for me! How can I let you go again?" That, at least, he did not say, although he held her against his breast, laid his face on her hair. The tension was but for a moment; she disengaged herself quickly and dried her eyes. What had come to them had always been there.

There was still much to be done. Dr. Shorter insisted upon a trained nurse being sent for at once, one of his own choosing; he paid not the slightest attention to Manuella's protest that she was quite able to nurse the child herself with Mary's help and cook's.

"There is some bronchitis, the distance between the bronchial tubes and the lungs isn't worth speaking about. We might have pneumonia to fight. He has got to be watched every hour, and it needs a trained eye."

As he talked, he was putting up his case of drugs, clearing up matters generally, giving instructions. When he was saying good-bye to Manuella, almost casually, he asked, as the dispensary doctor had done:

"Where is his father? If I were you I should send for him. There must be a certain amount of anxiety for the next few days. Where is he?"

Perhaps the moment when she cried on Waldo's shoulder had not escaped him, although he was occupied with the baby. What was Lord Lyssons doing here? Dr. Shorter was a trained observer with an excellent memory. She flushed when he repeated:

"Send for your husband," and started to answer, but shut her lips.

"Anything wrong between them?" Dr. Shorter asked Waldo as they went downstairs.

"Nothing that I know of," the other answered indifferently. But, of course, he was not indifferent.

He went straight back to the nursery when the doctor left. The baby was sleeping, and Manuella was for the moment seated idly by his cot, looking forlorn. He beckoned her out of the room.

"He is all right for the present, Shorter is more than satisfied. Nurse will call out to you if he wakes. Come down and see about getting me some lunch; I missed my breakfast on your account, you know."

He put a gentle, familiar arm through hers, made her go downstairs with him and sit in the dining-room whilst he ate, making her eat with him. Afterwards in the sitting-room he forgot to be whimsical. She looked so young, so unhappy; it was so long since he had held her in his arms, and they ached for her. He did not know how it was he found himself on the sofa, holding her.

He really loved her in the best way, in the only way, in every way; but she had been in trouble, had sent for him, clung to him. His own courage was a little broken, and he held her close.

"It has been hard?"

"I thought you were not sorry. . . ."

"Not sorry! My God! I don't know how I have borne it. . . ." Silence fell between them.

She was overwrought, lonely; the tenderness in his voice moved her, she had loved him always. The movement came from her, she knew it afterwards, but his response was quick. Now their lips came together, and clung . . . and again she was ashamed, hiding her face.

"I only want to be comforted."

Her voice was stifled.

"I only want to cherish you."

Silence again.

"Why didn't you comfort me yesterday?"

"Yesterday, to-day, every day I will do so."

What was he saying? He only knew that his arms held her, his lips still throbbed from meeting hers, her head was on his shoulder, and his face among her hair, against her soft cheek.

"Did I disappoint you yesterday?"

"I was very unhappy."

"Because I scolded you—did I scold you? Dear heart, I was only trying to take care of you."

"How did you know?"

"Know what? That I wanted to take care of you? Since I met you on the boat, your hair flying in the wind, your eyes glowing. . . ."

"I mean about Harston."

"What about Harston? He didn't exist."

"You know he has left me."

"*What! Left you,* left you?"

His arms fell from her, their startled faces gazed at each other.

"But didn't you know it yesterday?"

"It isn't true, it isn't possible?"

"That is why. . . ."

She would have sought the shelter of his shoulder again, but he got up abruptly.

"He went away yesterday with Alma Orilia. She sent Mr. Graham to tell me. I thought you knew."

"You thought I knew?"

"You said . . ."

But both of them had forgotten what he said, they only remembered that she had lost her temper over it.

He walked up and down the room whilst she told him—told him every word Peter Graham had said to her. Then fighting for his self-command, he began questioning her, even cross-questioning her.

"But if this is true . . .?"

He could not help his spirit leaping to it. She belonged to him by every right—the right of love and his tenderness for her. He told her so, held her to him again,

looked deep into her eyes, behind which he saw the white soul shining.

" If this is true . . . ! "

And then, all at once, because at the bottom of his heart lay his chivalry, he left off thinking of himself and began to think only of her. What was best? He saw quickly, and unhappily he saw clearly. They might wade knee-deep in mud, he and she, and all of them, and in the end find themselves swimming in cleaner water. He was her guardian as well as her lover. Again he put her away from him.

"Let me think."

They were the same words Peter Graham had used.

" No, let us leave off thinking."

She was so near him that his arm went about her perforce.

" It has made me feel free."

" And freedom for you means my tyranny."

" You used to treat me like a child. I have grown so tired of being treated like a woman. Take care of me a little. I am lonely without you. . . . "

" Dear heart, you will always be a child."

" I wasn't a child when . . . when . . . "

" Tell me."

" When you kissed me . . . that evening. It seems centuries ago, when you said you . . . you always kissed girls."

" Did I say that? Do you want to hear? Never in my life have I kissed a woman or girl as I kissed you that night, as I kiss you now. You believe it? "

" I want to believe it."

" It all went wrong between us. Fool that I was! "

" But it is coming right now. Harston never cared for me, only for his music. Nor I for him. Now that he has left me . . . "

Again he loosened his arms about her.

There are so many ways of love, and in all of them he loved her. And now he knew that she cared for him, he

wanted to take care of her more perfectly. No one else could do it, for no one else understood her. If it were true that her husband had left her, a way out might be found, a muddy way for slender feet, and one he could not easily see her treading.

And her story had left his mind unconvinced.

"You have not had a word from him?"

"Only the message Mr. Graham brought me."

"That he would come back . . ."

She was hurt by his change of tone, almost more than hurt.

He hardly knew how to go on.

"You hadn't had a row?"

"Not a word."

His speech slowed down, his mind seemed now to be keeping better pace with it, and took a strengthened leap toward the truth.

"I can't believe he has left you, not like this, not in this way. It's incredible."

She could not follow the working of his mind; she was wounded, silenced, thrown back upon herself, her confidence rejected.

"Wasn't the new opera ready? Didn't he say they were to meet some one about it?"

"He said they were going to meet Stollmont in Genoa. But, of course, that was only an excuse."

"If . . . if he had not gone with her, not in the way you think, but only about his opera? You say that young fellow, Tommy Traddles, when he came for his things, said it was business." He was speaking slowly, thinking and speaking at the same time.

"Gerald would say anything Harston told him."

She felt that he was trying to make excuses for Harston, imagined that, because he was no longer kissing her, his sympathy had ebbed; and she was, as always, quickly resentful.

Waldo, so full of his love and care for her, never doubted that she understood. He said he had to think, and could do so better alone. She had had a disturbed

night, looked pale and worn, she had better go upstairs and lie down, and deny herself to visitors. He went away quite soon; not kissing her again, nor even touching her hand.

The next day and the next visitors came to that little house in Circus Road, everyone came but Lord Lyssons. There came Peter Graham, full of concern at the baby's illness, extraordinarily tactful, and staying less than five minutes; Oscar Des Vœux with his wife, full of chagrin, explanation and curiosity; Lulu Marston, warm-hearted, quite incredulous, full of sympathy and quotations from Russell.

"Russell says I am not to let you stay alone here, thinking all sorts of absurd things. He is quite sure it is all a mistake. And Russell is never wrong. He says you are to come to us on a long visit. Now, just go and put your things on. I've got the motor. You'll feel as different as possible when you are up at Gloucester Terrace."

Lulu had on the biggest hat Manuella had ever seen, with more ospreys, a veil that was neither on nor off, a dress of the fashion of the year after next, all the scents of the Levant. But her heart was even richer than her clothes. She caught the girl in her arms, kissed her cheeks, said not one word that could hurt her, but found all the right ones. If it had been Harston who was responsible for all Manuella's trouble, she might have gone with Lulu, been warmed by a rare friendship, made whole in the fine atmosphere she created. But it was not Harston and Alma Orilia, it was of Waldo and his imaginary defection, that her heart was full.

For, after that time when he had held her in his arms, and said he would cherish her always, told her he had never kissed anyone else and never would, Waldo stayed away. That is to say, he came when other people were there—came in, and went away again, saying only inconsequent things; he talked of going abroad as soon as Dr. Shorter pronounced baby out of danger, ignored all that had happened between them.

Before the end of the week, like a flower after rain, her head was upraised, proud on the stalk of her neck, and she met him as if his kiss had never warmed her lips nor her head drooped on his shoulder, as if she had never needed comforting, nor had comfort from him.

She went about her household duties. The hospital nurse wanted a great deal of attention; there were long hours when she went out walking, recreated or slept, all according to the regulations of the Institute, most religiously kept. Then Manuella took her place in the nursery.

When Waldo would have spoken to her, and given her the result of his deep thinking, she was ensconced behind her defences, inaccessible. The day Dr. Shorter said he would come no more, because baby was no longer convalescent but well, was the day Waldo started for Rome. He knew he must confront Harston, if necessary Alma Orilia. This was not a case for lawyers, not yet, it needed delicate handling, clear explanation; they must know where they all stood.

CHAPTER XXVIII

HE did not dream she would resent his going, never guessing his destination. He had made up his mind slowly, never thinking hers was not marching with it. The telegram he sent her only said: "Going abroad; destination uncertain."

He had meanwhile been making inquiries, using all the means at his disposal, locating not Harston and Alma, but Stollmont. Genoa? Milan? Naples? Rome? Nobody knew, save that the impresario had left America, and would be found at one or the other city. When he read in the papers that Stollmont's first production would be the new opera by the composer of *The Chariot Queen,* and that Alma Orilia would create the title rôle, he knew his quest was ended.

To Manuella, the telegram was like a blow in the face. And she wanted to strike back. That is one explanation of what followed. The other is that the devil, always lurking for opportunity, could not let this one pass.

Dr. Shorter paid his last visit.

"The child is really quite well. All you have to do is to keep him so. We've a trying winter in front of us; he would really be safer in a warmer climate. . . ."

Dr. Shorter did not stay for question or answer, he was

always outrageously overworked. And all he could do here was done.

"Get him out of London if possible," he said as he shook hands with her, noting that she looked wan and unhappy, thinking the prescription would do for both of them.

Peter Graham, coming in opportunely, heard that Dr. Shorter advised a warmer climate. To urge the Riviera scheme again upon her was therefore clearly his duty. She became aware that, if Waldo was unreliable, and not there for her to lean upon, Mr. Graham's kindness towards her had not flagged.

Dr. Shorter was scarcely out of the house, certainly not back in Harley Street, before it was decided that the advice he had given should be taken. He had said nothing about the Riviera, nor a long journey abroad; but Peter Graham, and under his guidance, Manuella, took it for granted. "Out of London" could only be "out of England"; "a warmer climate" implied the South. The villa was ready.

Some misgiving Manuella may have felt about the long journey, for she went up to discuss it with the hospital nurse. At Peter Graham's suggestion she sent the nurse down to him, that he might give her details. When she returned to the nursery the nurse said she had no doubt, no doubt at all, that it would be to the child's advantage.

"It isn't, of course, as if you were taking him alone, or with an inexperienced person. I shall wrap him up well for the journey, keep flannel or wool over his face, and shelter him from draughts."

The hospital nurse liked the idea of getting away from London in November, with the prospect of a long engagement; she had never been on the Riviera. She and Peter played, perhaps unconsciously, perhaps not, into each other's hands. All was to be hurry; baby must be "got away before the fogs came;" "there was no reason for delay."

Manuella's hurt feelings, characteristic impulsiveness,

and passionate anxiety for the child, were all worked upon. Peter Graham made all the arrangements, or helped with them. He was indefatigable in helping; accentuating her fears, scenting fog like a hound with a hare.

Once Manuella made up her mind that, if Waldo or Harston should come back leisurely they should not find her there waiting for them, she was all anxiety to be gone. But each day, secretly, owning it not even to herself, she watched the post for a letter. And each day, when no letter came from Waldo, she felt his neglect more acutely. Her hands trembled with indignation when she thought of the words he had said to her, and at the remembrance of her own admissions her cheeks burned. Her breath was caught in her throat, and shame was as a living thing when she thought how she had thrown herself into his arms, asked him for comfort, almost offered herself to him. Now she had to show him she could think and act for herself. She could not sleep, she could not rest until she started, leaving no clue behind.

Peter Graham's villa presented itself to her as a refuge, a hiding-place from everybody, from everything; from pity and love and pain.

She was as a young wounded animal, only wanting to hide. For Peter Graham she cared nothing. If he was unaware of it, that was because his vanity stood like a concrete thing between himself and his intelligence; which at its best was but as a musician's intelligence, of crotchet and quaver proportions and limited gradations. He had never failed with a woman, ergo, he never would. He would make her no protestations, no scene of passion in her husband's house, in these inappropriate surroundings. He would await his and her mood, spend time and a wealth of ingenuity in leading her into the mood and the surroundings. He was no hot youth, but a *gourmet* in love, all that was most sensitive in his jaded palate anticipated the end. There was not a man living knew better than he how to overcome a woman's virtue.

To him Manuella's virtue was the ultimate charm, so that it was a yielding charm to him, to him only. And he had no doubts.

There was not one of Manuella's beauties that escaped him. He realized how well she was formed, the graceful line from hip to ankle, the small bust and slender arms, the dainty, delicate ears, the ivory skin with its warm underflush, easily provoked. He knew much more about her externally than Waldo did, although Waldo had been her fiancé. But he knew less perhaps about her strength, or her courage, or her loyalty.

Cook and the baby's nurse were dismissed, the house dismantled and closed, the key left with the agent, and no address given. Manuella and the baby, with the hospital nurse, were on the way to Paris before Waldo had been gone a week on his quest.

Peter Graham sent his motor car to take them to Folkestone. The sea was calm, and already at Boulogne it seemed as if she had left half her troubles behind her. Travelling on the Continent was like renewing her youth. So much of it had been passed abroad, she had been happy in continental schools, far happier than under Lœtitia's surveillance. There came to her again that sense of escape she had always had when out of reach of her step-mother's cold and disapproving eyes. Then she had only been unhappy in leaving Bertie behind; Bertie, whom she had always mothered. To-day she cuddled her baby in her arms, and there was no feeling that she had left behind her a fellow-prisoner in bondage. Every trouble was taken off her hands by the admirable courier Peter Graham's forethought had provided. They were not travelling by the *train de luxe,* so she had not the discomforts of that overrated method to overcome. Peter told her that the man would pay for everything, and give her an account at the end of the journey. She was only practical in strata, so to speak, and was quite content with the arrangement. Having stipulated for economy, she rested content that it was being considered.

When she found herself in one of the garden suites at the "Ritz" she had no thought of extravagance to mar her enjoyment of its luxurious quiet. When, the next day, she was ensconced in a reserved compartment in the Côte d'Azur, she looked upon it as a happy coincidence that in a compartment for six people only two should be travelling. At every stoppage tea or fruit was brought to her; she was advised to leave the carriage and take a turn on the platform, or told to retain her seat, as the case might be. The courier was an excellent specimen of his class, and had been well-instructed. The nurse was equally competent, and the baby slept a great part of the day.

At Mentone they found a swift car waiting for them; there was no delay for luggage to be cleared. All possible fatigue of travelling had been spared her.

They arrived at Mentone too late to see anything of the villa, but a simple supper was served to them by a deft Swiss who seemed to understand how little Manuella wanted but bed.

Manuella's room was large, and, for a French bedroom, luxurious. There were French windows and a balcony, she could see that, and hear the soft murmur of the sea beneath it; her unhappiness seemed to float away on the sound.

She woke up after eight hours' dreamless sleep to find the sun streaming into her room. From the open jalousies of the windows she saw the blue of the Mediterranean. Then, getting out of bed, in her *peignoir,* her hair floating, she stepped on to the balcony. Beyond the lemon and orange trees lay brown rocks, blue sea, and streaks of clear green.

The sun shone on the water. In the garden, although it was November, yellow roses grew amid the palms and oleanders; mimosa scented the air, and in the green of a great low camellia bush hundreds of buds showed pink and promising. But it was the sea that held her, the blue and tideless sea, embayed in the mountains.

The sun dazzled her, and after she had taken in her surroundings, she stepped back into her room, to dress, to visit the baby, to ring for breakfast, to feel herself renewed, and more ready to face the future than she had thought possible forty-eight hours earlier.

The next few days were days of rest, days when to rise each morning in the sunshine was almost enough for happiness. She had thought happiness was something that was over for her, but she found it again here, or such a simulacrum that she took heart, and thought it was real.

The villa had a history. Built by an English nobleman, shared with a pale and wonderful woman and her complaisant husband, it was called *Homage de Soleil,* but came quickly to be known as the *Villa Macquereau.*

Peter Graham bought the freehold for a song when the English nobleman married and the French artist was found asphyxiated with gas fumes. Although of ornate architecture and limited accommodation, there were some of the comforts of an English home, including three bathrooms and a big music-room. The music-room had been a studio but was easily adapted.

Peter Graham kept two servants always there, a Swiss manservant and his wife, bringing with him, on his own visits, what was necessary to complete the household for his comfort. Knowing the simplicity of Manuella's tastes, he thought that, for the moment, the two would be sufficient for her. All his plans were carefully laid. She had spoken of expense, and he meant her to think she was living economically.

For a few days she sat about on the balcony or in the garden, in the continual sunshine, playing with the baby, seeing gladly the brown come into his cheeks, and the blue deepen in his eyes, noticing his willing tongue commencing to articulate, proud of his efforts to walk, although as yet they were but tentative.

Naturally, she wrote and thanked Mr. Graham for all his kindness, asked for her accounts, praised his courier

and his villa, told him how the baby had already gained weight and strength.

She was neither surprised nor startled that his reply was headed "Hôtel de Paris, Monte Carlo." She was glad rather, a little tired of being alone, glad of anything that would prevent her thinking always of Waldo and wishing he were with her.

"I have come south, after all. I caught a bad cold the day you left and my doctor insisted. May I drive over this afternoon? I should so like to see how you are getting on."

"Of course. How can you ask? You will find me at home at any time."

When Peter came, she was on the verandah in the long, cushioned lounge-chair; she had not expected him so early, and may even have been dozing. The idle, sunny days conduced to somnolency. She sprang up hastily, but he had a swift vision of her sleeping there and it mounted to his head a little. He was less calculated in his warmth, and his r's were more pronounced.

"But how well you are looking!" This was true. "How glad I am to see you here."

"Here in my house" was what he meant although he did not word it; but she saw what was in his mind, and, perhaps for the first time, some slight misgiving touched her. That was why she began to express her thanks quickly.

"I have been well ever since I came here. So has the boy. It was so kind of you to lend me the villa, perhaps I oughtn't to have accepted it. We are so comfortable, everything seems different. But if we inconvenience you here? Why should you have to be at an hotel?" The question rushed out as soon as it presented itself to her.

Peter had no difficulty in reassuring her. He said hastily that he never used the villa when he was "alone

in Monte Carlo." The relative truth of this made him smile.

"They are used to me at the 'Paris.'"

He spoke of the good food at the hotel, and the subterranean passage to the Casino and the Sporting Club. It was unnecessary to tell her that he avoided the one and was rarely at the other. The Monte Carlo of newspapers and novelists had no attraction for Peter Graham. He did not care to gamble in the fœtid air of the overcrowded rooms amid the Germans whose guttural accents, hideous clothes, and worse manners jarred his sensibilities. If he wanted to gamble, although gambling was not among his foibles, Nice suited him better.

Until he bought the villa he had sometimes spent a month or six weeks at Nice or Cannes. After he bought the villa he generally arranged his winter accordingly. He had never lived there alone. This winter he wanted Manuella to play hostess to him; he had never wanted anything so much in his life. He knew it whilst he was expressing his satisfaction with the Hôtel de Paris. At the "Paris" there were German officers with slashed, spoiled faces, women whose profession was written on their expensive clothes, illustrated in their flashing jewellery, colour-printed in their many-scentednesses and easiness of approach. Manuella Migotti, in her white dress, here, in this quiet hidden pleasaunce, was infinitely more to his taste. He asked her if she would give him luncheon and all the afternoon he lingered with her in that garden by the sea.

The first day was one of many. He proceeded to his objective very slowly; there seemed no occasion for hurry. Her address was unknown and she would have no letters. There came no other visitors. No one knew where she was hiding from gossip and the ignominy of being a deserted wife. He did not go into details even to himself. It was enough that she was here, and so was he. Always she was grateful to him, glad that he should come, greeting him without guile. By subtle indefinite hints and innuendoes, by an attitude of solicitous and

sympathetic wonderment that such a state of affairs should come about, he kept before her the remembrance that her husband had deserted her, and that she was alone in the world.

At first he sat with her on the verandah, lounged with her in the garden. But, before many days had gone by, he ventured to suggest that, since she was here, it was a pity she should not see some of the beauties of the Riviera.

"I am very happy where I am, I don't want to go out." She was difficult to persuade, but that made the task better worth accomplishing. It appeared he had his motor with him, and that, up to now, he had only gone from the Hôtel de Paris to the villa and back again.

"I want you to go up La Turbie. If you would rather go by yourself, I shall be quite satisfied to remain here until you come back and tell me what you think of the view. I don't want to be in your way, but really I think you should go out sometimes and see what there is to be seen."

She went at his persuasion to La Turbie, lunching with him at the hotel that hangs half-way up the mountain, going on afterwards to see the golf links laid amid the snow. It was thoroughly enjoyable. He said nothing to startle or alarm her, and when he suggested the next excursion to the *Reserve* at Beaulieu, she accepted at once. There they lunched on the balcony, looked down on the brown rocks, where the sea, patchily brown or blue, reflected now the rocks and now the sky.

It was, indeed, only the first step that counted, and quite soon these excursions were of daily occurrence. Daily the motor came up to the villa at twelve or at four. Peter Graham knew exactly what he was doing, and that everybody was seeing them together. They went to Cap Martin and to Nice, and even as far as Cannes, up the Corniche Road or the Esterel, to afternoon concerts in the Casino, once in the evening to the opera.

To Manuella these were just so many hours in which

she had respite from her thoughts, from her ache in hearing no word from Waldo. She did not know where he was; that he was in like case with regard to herself never occurred to her. He had not asked her to write, he had gone away without a word.

Presently it became part of Peter's method to tell her that the noise of the hotel, the sound of the tramcars outside, were getting on his nerves, depriving him of sleep, to hint that there was room for him as well as her at the villa.

"Nurse would be a sufficient chaperone," he said once, half in jest, "always presuming we were conventional people needing a chaperon. I suppose if your husband were here he would treat me as if I were Gerald Streatfield, and keep me to play with him of an evening. . . ."

When he spoke of music now he spoke of himself as an artist, not as an amateur. Professional musicians, like actors and actresses, have, of course, exceptional social latitudes. He, too, it appeared, and he had no doubt Manuella agreed with him, despised convention.

"Of course, I know you are above such things . . ."

Why should he not stay at the villa? There are subtleties of method difficult to combat, and Peter Graham was master of them all. He said he understood women, and, indeed, there were many of whom it was true. This one was impulsive, emotional, not without temperament, but ignorant, innocent beyond anything he had met. He learnt all that, although he had only suspected it before he brought her here. He knew now that he must find her in the mood, wait and watch.

He was walking so delicately, by such wary imperceptible steps, it was natural she should not see where he was leading her. It was not within her understanding or knowledge of the world to perceive that she was being "compromised," intentionally compromised. She was bitterly hurt by Waldo's absence, Waldo's silence; resentful, too, of her husband's desertion. She was of a generous nature, yet could not but remember how much

she had given, and for how little it had counted. Both of them had left her, Waldo and Harston, that much was sure. She was sore and wounded, unreasonable, perhaps, still very young.

"Let me tell my man he may move my things over. You are not pretending to be conventional, are you? You don't think Harston would mind, do you?"

"I know he doesn't care," was her hasty reply.

"People come to the hotel at all hours of the night; it is so terribly noisy. I get no sleep." He coughed a little, complained of his throat.

CHAPTER XXIX

LORD LYSSONS meanwhile was proving himself but an indifferent detective, and, when he had found what he sought, an even worse negotiator. He journeyed from Genoa to Naples and then back again to Milan on the strength of unreliable information. He was ten days away from London before he got to Rome, where, it seemed, not only Migotti and Alma Orilia, but Stollmont himself had been all the time. No grass was growing under their feet, certainly. Stollmont had secured the Costanzi for the season, and was already announcing *Il Traditore* for his first production. What series of circumstances had led up to this decision Lord Lyssons did not ask; it was no part of his objective.

When at length he heard of Alma Orilia in a luxuriously furnished flat near the theatre he seemed little farther in his quest for Harston Migotti; certainly they were not together. But at the theatre there was no difficulty in obtaining the musician's address; the theatre was billed with the announcement of the forthcoming production of:

"*Il Traditore,* by Harston Migotti."

Waldo telegraphed to Manuella without further delay:

"Obviously a mistake. Not together."

He sent the telegram to Circus Road, but Manuella

never received it. She had left for Peter Graham's villa on the Riviera before it arrived.

Migotti was in Rome and at the Hôtel Marini, but it seemed he was never at home. Anyway, Waldo was engaged nearly a week in securing an interview, and he did not succeed even then without great difficulty.

"Ah, yes! You called yesterday, and the day before. But I am so much occupied, from morning until night I am occupied."

Harston was polite, incurious as to the object of Lord Lyssons' call, obviously impatient of interruption.

"My hands are so full. There is nothing like sufficient time for rehearsals." The light of genius was in his eyes; his hair was longer than ever and excessively rumpled.

They were in the bare *salon d'attente* of the small third-class hotel. Harston had come to his visitor here, holding the card in his hand.

"I am not seeing people at all. But they told me you had been again, and yet again. What is it you have to say to me? I have but a minute, Madame Orilia is calling for me. . . ."

Waldo took his eye-glass out; he felt embarrassed, and knew that what he had come to say was impossible to put into words.

"I come from London."

"From London?"

"Where I saw your wife." The light of genius dulled a little. Waldo thought he flushed.

"She is well? Manuella is well?"

"Quite. But the child has been very ill."

Harston was ready to tear his wild hair, weep, make a scene.

"You have come to tell me that my son is dead!"

"No! No! He has made a complete recovery."

"But you have not come all this way to tell me that?" He was taken aback, puzzled.

"Not exactly." Waldo put his glass back. "Not exactly." Harston became more impatient.

"The child, for the moment, is well . . . for the moment. But the attack may recur. The doctor said to your wife: 'You had better send for your husband.' So I came," this strange ambassador finished lamely.

"I have had no letter, nor telegram," Harston said shortly. Now there was a gleam of understanding or doubt, but there was still the attitude of impatience.

"I was coming this way," Waldo continued, as if from London to Rome were less than a step.

His eyes were quite steady, but the other's were flickering and uncertain. In an altered tone Harston said now:

"Did she send me any other message?"

"No, not exactly a message." They began to understand each other. "You see, she did not know I was coming. Would you care to hear what she said to the doctor?"

"What did she say to the doctor?"

"She said, in effect: 'My husband has gone away with Madame Alma Orilia, and has not left me his address.'"

Harston's face grew very pale, and the light in his eyes went out suddenly, as if it had been turned off at the main.

"She said that?"

"In effect."

"It is a lie!"

"I thought it might be a lie."

"Who told her that?"

"It appears to be no secret. Madame Orilia's brother and sister-in-law, and many of your friends, have been to Circus Road to sympathize with her."

"It is a lie," he said again. And then suddenly he was irresolute.

"Of course I left London with Alma Orilia," he shouted. "What of that? What of that?"

"That is the question," repeated Lord Lyssons easily. He saw the change in the man's face. "Do you mind if I light a cigarette? It is allowed here? Yes, that is the question."

"What have *you* to do with it?" Harston asked abruptly, rudely.

But Waldo was prepared for that inquiry.

"I am representing your wife's brother, who, with her father and mother, is in South Africa." He spoke quite steadily, and as if it were natural that he should represent her people.

If Harston Migotti's conscience had been clear he might have answered differently; as it was he said angrily:

"We came to meet Stollmont. Alma will sing the title rôle in *Il Traditore*."

The door was flung open, and Alma Orilia, superbly ugly in her dark furs and ill-temper, broke impatiently upon their colloquy:

"I have been waiting ten minutes, twenty minutes, half an hour. . . ."

She stopped short on seeing he was not alone.

"This is Lord Lyssons. . . ."

She made a sullen acknowledgment of the introduction. Waldo said politely that he was sorry he was the cause of her having been kept waiting. He was interested to see whether Migotti would explain his presence there and state the object of his visit.

"He has come from England, from my wife," Harston said with embarrassment, with an effort. Her brow grew black:

"You know Stollmont is coming at three. We shall hardly have time to get through lunch." She ignored what he said. Then she laughed, and returned to it. "Your wife has, perhaps, sent for you to return. She does not want I shall create the rôle of Queen Cartismandua?" She looked at Lord Lyssons, and Waldo answered gravely:

"I believe Madame Migotti is most grateful to you for that."

"The child has been ill," Harston interposed.

She looked from one to the other of the men.

"You will go back? You will abandon the production?"

"It could go on without me?"

"Or me?"

"You don't mean it!"

She shrugged her shoulders, but there was battle in her eyes.

"My friend, if you go, *if* you go . . ." she made a dramatic gesture with her hands, "it is finished. It is I who have persuaded Stollmont; he does not believe at all in your opera, nobody here believes in it. Go back to your wife, or to nurse your baby, or what you like. But if you go, the opera goes; I shall not stay; your opportunity goes . . ." She went toward the door.

"You see . . ." Harston said. "You see . . . I have no choice."

But what Lord Lyssons saw was different. She showed him by her rage that she was not sure of Migotti's allegiance, that she doubted her hold on him.

He followed them leisurely, and was in time to note that she was leaning forward in the carriage, talking passionately and quickly, that Migotti still appeared irresolute, and as if he were defending himself.

They passed him again later on, seated side by side. Now she had a proprietorial air, and it was as if Harston Migotti was a captive in her chariot.

Waldo had a restless day, a wakeful night. The position was quite clear to him, not what he had hoped to find, although he hardly knew for what he had hoped. He was sufficiently conversant with the divorce laws of England to know that one stepped into them as into a morass; the parties must walk gingerly together if they would skirt it. Harston Migotti was not a man in the throes of a passion, who would do anything, that he might indulge it. He was only a composer who wished his music sung perfectly.

Harston Migotti came to him in the morning, and showed himself still irresolute, irresolutely explanatory.

"I have written to Manuella. She knows how important this production is to me. . . . I have told her

she must not be jealous. You will see her, you will tell her, you will explain?"

Waldo asked him what it was he wished explained.

"Is it your relations with Madame Orilia? If so, give me my brief, tell me what I am to say."

But Harston found it difficult of explanation. It appeared he could not do without Alma Orilia—not now, at least, although he could have done without the scenes she made for him. He had not the delicacy to conceal that there was only one way to keep Alma Orilia in his service.

"It is impossible to explain to Manuella. I don't know what you will say to her. She has sent you to me, to tell me that I must come back, that now, now at this minute, I must give up Alma. But no one else can sing my music as she can sing it. . . ."

Waldo, unlike himself from the effect of his bad night, forgot it was a genius to whom he was talking, something between a child and a man, not wholly responsible, and answered impulsively:

"She did not send me at all; I came entirely on my own responsibility. I am her friend, her brother's friend." He struggled for his calm, and the right phrase. "She is alone, and knows you are with Alma Orilia. She need not remain alone. You take that in, don't you? There is another man. . . ."

He was speaking of himself, under great emotion. But Harston misread him.

"There is a man who wants the place you have abandoned—the place by her side, the right to cherish her, give her back happiness, let her youth flower. But only if he can take it honestly, without hurting her or her honour. . . ."

"You are telling me this?"

"This man loves her, not selfishly. . . ."

"*My wife? My Manuella?*"

"With his whole heart. He will not see her neglected, deserted, put aside for the convenience or gratification of this—this other woman." He could not go on.

Harston repeated stupidly:

"My little Manuella! My wife of the hearth! But no! it is not possible!" And then with a sudden enlightenment:

"I know of whom you are telling me, Alma has already told me. It is Mr. Graham, Mr. Peter Graham. You have seen them together? I understand, I understand now quite well why you have come! But it is not true, it is not possible. My wife loves me; she would not do such a thing. What must I say or do? I am quite distracted. I shall send for her to come to me, I shall tell her everything. . . ."

Waldo could not bring himself to say that it was not of Peter Graham that he had spoken. Harston behaved like a lunatic, a woman, or a musician. He wrung his hands and cried, he said it was impossible and incredible, and so wicked that he would not believe it. Mr. Peter Graham was his friend, and Manuella was his wife, and they would not spoil his opera.

Waldo had to calm him presently, and to say that nothing had happened, he was quite sure nothing had happened; he merely warned him. It took quite a long time to restore the young composer's calm and reassure him. Waldo sickened over the task, for it showed him a sterner one. In incoherent phrases, confessions, Harston let fall the admission that she had cause of complaint.

"But I have not left her, nor thought of leaving her, or my son—my son, to whom I dedicated the *Berceuse,* who will be to me as Siegfried Wagner. Tell me what I must do? But I cannot go, I cannot go away, until my opera is produced. . . ."

He had no intention of behaving badly to Manuella. The man was half-hearted in his infidelity, if it were an infidelity, and not merely an artistic aberration. In a burst of reluctant confidence he revealed himself more clearly.

"No one else can sing my music as she sings it. If she knows that Manuella comes she will be upset, she will make scenes, her voice will suffer. She wishes that

we shall be alone until after the opera is produced. Manuella disturbs, distresses her."

Nevertheless, in the end, but not until further days had sped, and Lord Lyssons' irresolution almost rivalled Harston's, Alma Orilia herself decided that Manuella must be sent for, must come to Rome. Only a week before the production Juan Orilia telegraphed to his wife that he intended to be present! She knew enough of Juan to realize what that meant. He had heard something . . . that he had heard all, and more than all, was also possible. For only three days ago she had dismissed her maid, having quarrelled with her. Alma Orilia knew and feared her husband's temper.

"You had better send for your jealous wife since my jealous husband is coming, unexpectedly," she said suddenly. "He will see you are together, and that it is not with me you are here. One must be circumspect."

Impelled by that new desire of hers to be circumspect, Harston came again to Waldo.

"I shall telegraph her to come to me; you agree that is best? She will know then that I have not deserted her, that it is only my opera."

Waldo had no choice but to agree. It was clear that, whatever had happened or was happening, Manuella was not to be free. He saw clearly that if that were so, it were better that she should be here. There would be the need of a great giving and forgiving, but she had told him that in all her married life, when she gave most her heart had the greater ease. She was generous and just, above all things, loyal. When she saw, as he saw, that her husband had need of her, being unfit to stand alone, and that Alma Orilia had not courage of her crime, she would come. Alma's fear of Juan Orilia would make Manuella contemptuous, but not cruel.

As for himself, there was nothing to do but stand aside, go on for ever standing aside. It was to be the straight and narrow path for both of them. He thought he could trust himself to walk by her side in it; at least a little way, until her own feet were firm.

Lord Lyssons sent the telegram in Harston's name, begging her to join him in Rome, saying that nothing she had heard was true; she was to come to him at once. He offered to find rooms for her, meet her. Harston had not a moment to spare.

"And, after all, at the Hôtel Marini I am uncomfortable, not well placed. I have often indigestion. You will tell her that, when you meet her, and that I have missed her. . . ."

CHAPTER XXX

THE telegram was sent off, and Waldo awaited the result. He would not leave Rome until she came. She would face her life bravely, of that he was assured; and he would stay beside her until she knew all that she had to face, helping her if she needed help.

But one day passed, two days, three days, and there came neither reply, nor Manuella. It is impossible to deny that Lord Lyssons was more disturbed than Harston Migotti. Five and even six hours' rehearsals took from the latter the necessary capacity for excitement. They left him mentally exhausted; he ignored the passing days and that he ought to have had an answer from his wife. On Wednesday, Waldo met him coming home from one of these rehearsals, and asked him casually:

"Have you had a wire?"

The same question on Thursday made Harston brush his hand across his forehead in an attempt to remember from whom he expected a wire; but he was quite sure he had not had one from his wife.

"She is most probably on her way," he said comfortably. He was glad of the delay; nothing more had been heard from Juan Orilia, and Alma was more exacting than ever.

Lord Lyssons haunted the station, met every possible and impossible train. It was nearly a week before his uneasiness overwhelmed him. That day, for some rea-

son, there was no early rehearsal, and he found Migotti at his hotel. He made no secret of his perturbation:

"She has not come, nor wired? But she must have got both our wires on Tuesday evening!"

He had not previously told Migotti that he, too, had wired; but the information seemed to make no impression.

"Something *must* be the matter; the baby worse, perhaps, or Manuella herself ill?"

He did not succeed in communicating his own uneasiness to the composer. Harston did not, as Waldo almost expected, suggest taking the first train to England to find out for himself what had occurred; nor did he propose that Lord Lyssons should do so. He answered reassuringly that he was sure Gerald Streatfield would have let him know if there had been anything wrong, and, vaguely, that perhaps Manuella thought it better not to come to Rome. He seemed in a hurry to get away, although there was no rehearsal. Just as Waldo was leaving he said, inadvertently, and as if it had nothing to do with the subject:

"You know that Mr. Graham, of whom you spoke to me, is not in England at all; he is on the Riviera—at Nice or Monte Carlo."

He did not seem in the least to resent Lord Lyssons' anxiety, he wished only to relieve it.

But Waldo when he came away did not find himself relieved; his anxiety was, in fact, acute, and hourly gathering momentum. He thought he had acted for the best in coming out here. Now he was full of doubts. She might be ill, or the baby worse. He sent a "reply paid" wire to Dr. Shorter when he could bear it no longer. Whilst he was waiting for the answer he saw Madame Orilia. This was at her own request. Harston had told her of Lord Lyssons' anxiety, and she was curious to know the source of his interest, curious altogether about his presence in Rome. She was undoubtedly in fear of her husband, and the wild idea assailed her that it was on his behalf this English milord was here. Once she had thought she could disregard Juan as long

as baccarat was played at so many clubs in Paris, trente-et-quarante in Palermo, San Sebastian, or Monte Carlo, roulette in San Remo and other Italian health resorts. But she knew better now. If this Lord Lyssons, who was making himself troublesome to Migotti, who was so curious, and persistent in remaining in Rome, was a friend of Juan's, it was better she should see him know where she stood.

She was all graciousness at the beginning of the interview. The big, untidy characteristically-Italian flat, full of bizarre ornaments, generically called *art nouveau,* angular in contour, crude in colour, without any mystery but the mystery of wonder as to why they had been brought there, without beauty or utility, formed appropriate background for the superb ugliness of the popular singer. The Erard grand piano was littered with music, and the singer seemed littered with clothes—clothes of bright colours, loosely hung about her, while the jewellery she wore was incongruous. She had evidently made her toilette for him. She talked with amazing freedom of the opera and its chances, and was obviously on the most familiar terms with Migotti, directing him to do this or that, fetch her cigarettes or the hand-bag out of the bedroom, calling him Migotti without prefix, making a certain intimacy obvious. She seemed to flaunt their relations; but uneasily, watchfully. Waldo had not the clue to her conduct, and was puzzled by it. At the end she said:

"You will be seeing my husband? You will tell him we have met?"

He could only disavow any acquaintance with Signor Orilia.

Alma smiled and shrugged and disbelieved him, which helped to enlighten him. But, by now, he had little interest in her, or in Harston's relations with her. He was living between the telegraph office and the station. He counted up the days, and found it incredible that for over three weeks he had been without news of Manuella or the child.

Dr. Shorter's answer, when at length it came, was not of a nature to relieve him.

"House shut up. Key with agent. No address."

She had left home and she was not here! What did it mean? He wired again.

"When did she leave?"

It might be she was on her way here, travelling slowly. She might have met with an accident. When he knew she had left London three days after he saw her for the last time, every hour brought new fears. She might have gone to seaside or country, the child having perhaps been taken ill again. She did not know his whereabouts, and could not send for him as she had done last time. A wild thought that she might have gone out to South Africa shot across his mind, only to be dismissed. She would never have gone to Lœtitia. He had to find her. Alma Orilia was a dangerous woman, and her hold on Migotti was not to be ignored. All Rome was talking now, as all London had talked a few weeks ago. There was no time to be lost.

To go back to England, and make his own inquiries, was his obvious course. Migotti still could not be brought to see any cause for alarm.

"It is for the child's convalescence she has gone; to the English seaside, to the Isle of Wight, or to Torquay. We will hear soon; it will be all right."

He said he must not allow himself to be agitated or uneasy. The moment was too important, too vital. They were within ten days of the production. The King and Queen of Italy were to grace the first performance with their presence.

"After that, after that, I will search with you."

It was obvious that Manuella came second to the opera. But with Waldo she was, and would always be, first.

He took that wasted journey, back to England, only to find no news at the agent's, and no clue at the cottage.

Instinct, impulse, led him eventually to the quarry. But Manuella had been three weeks on the Riviera before this happened, three weeks in Peter Graham's villa by

the sea. When once Waldo knew Manuella was on the Riviera, the rest was comparatively easy. Peter Graham could not be *incognito* at the Hôtel de Paris at Monte Carlo.

The day Lord Lyssons heard at Smith's Bank that Mr. Graham was at the Hôtel de Paris was the very day Peter Graham left it for the villa. He had argued Manuella into the state of mind in which she saw the unfairness of keeping him out of his own house. She had meant to pay him rent for it, but this was apparently not yet due. It *was* his own house. He complained of sleeplessness and of the hotel being noisy. And it was true he looked pale, pale and nervous she would have said, although nervousness hardly expressed it.

Already he spent all his days at the villa, in the garden, or driving out with her. She was sorry about his insomnia. He had been very kind to her, overwhelmingly kind, when every other friend she had was away or indifferent.

Why should she keep him out of his own house? She talked it over with nurse, and nurse saw no valid reason. As for the Swiss servants, they openly deplored that he was not there.

His valet packed his things, and brought them over, staying to arrange them in his rooms. Peter arrived in time for lunch. During lunch, served on the verandah in wonderful sunshine and warmth, he said more than once how glad he was he had not to go back to the hotel, and that he was sure the quiet would restore his nerves. He looked or hinted other things; and already Manuella was uncomfortable, doubting her own wisdom. However subtle the attack, the necessity of repelling it was vaguely in her mind. He made no secret of his pleasure in her society, spoke of the charm of this intimate *ménage,* let fall a word, not unguarded, quite calculated in fact, of what people might say if they knew.

"But we are Bohemians, we can please ourselves. And this pleases me so much."

Until then she had not thought of what people might

say. She was already alarmed and startled before lunch was over, already looking this way and that for escape from the position into which her impulsiveness or imprudence had landed her, and yet ashamed to admit her uneasiness. Having deliberately aroused her, he set to work no less deliberately to reassure her. The whole position pleased him. She would be hopelessly compromised, become depressed, and need tenderness, consolation. He had an immense belief in himself, and his power of consoling a young woman in such a situation. She was emotional, passionate, impulsive, easily moved. It was pity made her assent to his coming here. She should pity him more. He knew just the scene he would make for her when she found she had estranged the world. He would be equally or more distressed. In anticipation he tasted on his palate these *hors d'œuvres* to the feast of love. It might be three days, it might be a week, before the feast was spread. He did not care any longer that she did not love him, although he knew it; although he knew, too, that she might come to hate him. But she could not escape, she would be a wild thing snared; whatever her struggles, he had the strength and subtlety to meet them. All through that lunch he felt the little flushes of his coming victory, sensing its delight. Of course she would struggle, her uneasiness now was the shadow of it. None of her fluctuating colour or spirits escaped him, he played on them. This was the first day of their life together.

"You ran away with Migotti, didn't you?" he asked her, apparently inadvertently. He liked to make her flush. He was sure of her now; sure as a man is that he has caught a bird when the bird is fluttering in his hand. He could be cruel, this Peter Graham; he liked, when he caught a bird, to let the tender thing flutter in his hand, to feel the beat of its wild heart.

"We must drink champagne to-day, our first day together," was another of the things he said. And she drank champagne to reassure herself, because she was uneasy, or uncomfortable, and felt she was to blame.

She tried to persuade herself there was no foundation for thinking Mr. Graham's manner had altered, and that it was just as it had always been. She drank wine to steady the unevenness of her pulses. Nothing had happened, nothing had altered; her imagination was playing tricks with her. After lunch she would go upstairs, go into the nursery, play with baby, talk to nurse. There was nothing of which to be frightened, no reason why her heart should be beating unevenly.

Peter made no effort to detain her; he was in no hurry. He went to the piano when she left him, and began to play softly; the whole atmosphere of this adventure was delightful to him. There would be no scandal; none of them would wish it. Her husband was in Rome with Alma Orilia; he could not have expected her to remain by herself in London. Peter did not look very far into the future. There is always a way out of such an adventure for a rich man. Alma would look after Migotti.

Of course he was startled when Lord Lyssons' card was brought to him, wakened rudely from a pleasant dream. He ceased playing abruptly:

"You told him I was not here? Surely you had the sense to say I was not here?"

"He did not ask. He only said, 'Tell Mr. Graham I wish to see him'!"

But there was no time for the man to tell his master what Lord Lyssons had said, or what arguments he had used to ensure his message being delivered, for Waldo was already in the room.

Peter rose quickly from the piano; he became immediately master of himself. There were a thousand things Lord Lyssons might have to say to him, none of them bearing on Manuella. He prided himself on his manners.

"I am very glad to see you; I had no idea you were out here. But everyone comes out here sooner or later. What shall I tell the man to bring you—whisky and soda—lemon? We have only just finished lunch."

"We?"

Lord Lyssons was in no humour for feinting; he started the attack at once.

Peter smiled and shrugged:

"I am afraid I must admit the conclusion; it is Monte Carlo, you know."

If they were fencing, Peter Graham had got in the first hit. But it was a mere touch, a prick. Waldo came for news of Manuella. Was he hearing she was here? It was impossible, incredible.

"Sit down, won't you?" said Peter pleasantly, familiarly.

He knew all at once, quite definitely, and without doubt, that it was about Manuella Lord Lyssons had come. And that he had a rival in him. He had to take his line quickly. There are circumstances under which any man must retire.

"I am at least alone for the moment. My . . ." he hesitated for half a second, but smiled as he found the right word, "*châtelaine* has gone upstairs to lie down. We take things easily here, *dolce far niente*, you know. But I daresay you have been through it yourself." What he implied was unmistakable. "Why are you standing?"

His manner said:

"I welcome you to my home, but do not be indiscreet, yet there is no secret about my little establishment here."

Waldo, not sitting down, nor coming further into the room, asked abruptly:

"Who is with you here?"

"My dear fellow!" Peter expostulated, smiling again. "You cannot expect me to tell you," was suggested by his manner. What he actually said was nothing to what he implied.

"A very charming young lady, believe me. We have been here nearly a month. Have you only just arrived?"

"I want an answer. Is Manuella Migotti here?"

"I am sorry, very sorry . . . you force me to it . . . I cannot answer your question. Why should I? Migotti

is in Rome with Alma Orilia. By whose authority do you ask?"

"I will show you my authority in a moment. I only want to know if Manuella is here?"

"And if I say yes—if I say that Madame Migotti has done me the honour to accept my protection?"

"I should reply that you are a liar."

Peter smiled, shrugged.

"As you please. You would perhaps prefer she had been with you; I understand she had her choice." It was a shot in the dark, but reached home.

How the scene would have ended is difficult to say. What the man was telling him with easy smile and those shrugged shoulders was impossible to believe. Yet it was certain she was here, had left no address, covered her traces! He knew her wild impulsiveness.

"I am certain you are lying," he said slowly. He could not lose faith in her so easily.

And then there was a swift vision, and a cry:

"Waldo! Waldo! *You* here, *Waldo!*"

The instant he saw her at the door doubt fled. He always affirms he never had a doubt. Her face was alight with pleasure at the unexpected sight of him, sound of his voice.

"How wonderful you should be here!"

"Isn't it? Such an out-of-the-way place!"

The lightness of his tone was his protection against himself; his heart was beating quickly and heavily. He had to hold himself in hand.

Her laugh was as fresh as when she was a girl.

"I don't mean that. But how did you find me out, how did you know I was here?"

"It was meant to be a secret, then?"

"You never left me your address. I did not know where you had gone . . . or why."

She was so glad to see him, so unfeignedly, genuinely glad to see him, that he could not maintain his cynic tone. In a moment she had forgotten all her harsh thoughts of him, his unkindness, his neglect, that he had left her

alone. All she remembered was that he was here; her quick change of mood was to one of great thankfulness. She felt that about which she did not reason. She had been imprudent in coming, impulsive in acceding to Mr. Graham's wish to live at the villa . . . but it was all right now, everything was all right. For Waldo had come.

She forgot her host, unsmiling now, pale, leaning up against the mantelpiece.

Waldo did not forget him, and Peter would not let himself be forgotten. He blundered, made the first serious blunder of his life. He tried to bluff the position.

"I told Lord Lyssons your being here was a secret, that you had been good enough to accept my protection. . . ."

Before Manuella had time to say how good he had been to her, and that is what he anticipated and what she would inevitably and gratefully have said, Waldo knocked him down—knocked him down before her astonished and horrified eyes.

Peter made no defence, there was no time for it. His head struck the fender in falling. Manuella made a rush to succour him, to kneel by him, exclaiming:

"How could you!"

Waldo put himself between them.

"Leave him alone; he is not fit for you to touch. Go upstairs, pack, and get out of this house as quickly as you can." She rose slowly, gazing from one man to another, bewildered.

"But . . ."

"Go. If you don't, I shall put you out." This was not the Lord Lyssons she knew, this was not Waldo at all. He was deadly in earnest, authoritative, without humour. "Damn you, don't dare to move"—this was to Peter, who made an effort to rise. "If you get up I shall knock you down again."

"Are you alone with him here?" he asked, when he opened the door for her.

"Nurse and baby are with me."

"I thought so."

It is not easy to thrash a man who makes no resistance. Waldo did his best when the door closed behind her, but made a poor job of his task. He thought of strangling Mr. Peter Graham, but refrained before his pallor; the lack of struggle made it impossible. He kicked him where he lay, finally, contemptuously, not even violently.

"Don't dare to move until we are out of the house. You hear that, don't you? . . . damn you!" He could not trust himself with the man, and went out into the hall, where Manuella joined him quickly.

"What happened? What did he do? He has been so awfully good to me. . . ."

"Oh, yes! A sweet fellow! I'm sure. Where's the nurse and the boy. You've a train to catch."

"A train. Where am I going?"

"To Rome, to your husband."

"To Harston, but——"

"Don't argue."

He was not himself at all until she was out of the house. They waited in the garden for nurse and baby and luggage. She questioned him, but his answers were short and impatient, unsatisfying.

"I can't talk to you here," was his apology.

"But what will you do if I say I won't come away?"

"Carry you out, make you."

"I can't understand. . . ."

"I know that—that is why I am not trying to explain. How much longer is she going to be? Can't she hurry up?"

Manuella, with the instinct that she had been in danger and escaped, that sense of reliance, and belief in him which she had always felt, said little more, waiting with him. One sentence escaped her.

"Does Harston really want me?"

"He telegraphed you ten days since to go to him in Rome. But we could not find you."

"He isn't ill?"

"No, he is not ill."

There was an hour or two to spare before the train was

due to start. He took Manuella, the child and nurse to the "Métropole," and made what hasty preparations he could for their comfort. He did not intend to go with them. He must stay here and see that Peter Graham spread no tales, told no more lies. A few words or so from Manuella and the position was clear to him. The fog in London and the croupy child; the promise of sunshine and warmth; her impulsive desire to get away, misapprehension of his own silence. She was not fit to take care of herself, she would never be fit. And he . . . he would have to stand aside again.

"Don't do anything foolish when you get to Rome, anything impulsive. Wait until I come."

"You are coming?"

"As soon as I have settled up here, settled Mr. Peter Graham." His voice was vindictive.

"You haven't told me . . ."

Then, with his eyes on hers, he said very quietly:

"Do you really need telling?"

She hesitated, changed colour; his eyes did not leave her face as he repeated his question.

"You need not answer," he said quickly, turning away.

"But I want to answer." She moved over to him and he waited.

"Well?"

She hung her head and spoke in a voice so low he had to stoop to hear it.

"I . . . I . . . guess——"

She was close to him. He wanted to put his arms about her, hold her. To all the world she was brave and strong, a woman; but to him she was always something of a child.

"You know how foolish you have been?"

"Don't scold me."

"You deserve it."

"That is why."

"Where did you think I was?"

"I didn't think."

"Nor trust me!" He kept his restraint upon himself,

went on quickly: "Perhaps you were right. I suppose I am rather erratic. I might have gone questing, looking for windmills . . ."

She wanted to know all about Harston, what lay before her in Rome, and he was glad to change the topic from Peter Graham and her imprudence.

"I will telegraph to him to meet you. If it misses him, if by any chance he is not at the station, you go there." He gave her an address. "They are comfortable rooms, and they are being kept vacant for you. About Harston . . ." he paused. "Well," he walked towards the window, looked out on the blue Mediterranean, tried for the best words. "They are not together, not in any sense of the word together. But she has some sort of feeling, blackguardly feeling, for him, which he does not return; he would be glad to be out of her toils. He only wants her to sing his music. I think you can help him. He is weak, you know. She will throw him over eventually, as sure as possible she will throw him over. There is her husband, too, to be reckoned with. It is quagmire for you . . ." he paused again, "but it is the right thing"—he was talking with his back to her, practically to himself—"I suppose it's the right thing. . . ." He broke off.

Again she came over to him; she was a creature of swift movement, and put her hand on his arm.

"You want me to do this?" He looked down on her, on those questioning eyes, those quivering lips.

"Is there any choice?" he asked slowly. The lovely flush mounted, darkening her eyes; her breath was uneven. "*Whom God hath joined.* It isn't just a *cliché,* I suppose?"

"No, I suppose not."

All that was unuttered between them he saw in her dejected eyes, she in his. Then very gently he took her hand from his arm.

"It is time we were starting."

If he sighed she hardly heard it. She was going back to Harston, to her duty; she herself had made the choice

between the two men. On Waldo she could have leaned, Harston would always lean on her; she braced her strength. Afterwards, at the station, when he had found the carriage for them and stood at the door talking, she seemed to understand better what she had escaped.

"If it had not been for you . . ." she began.

"That is what I want you to know." He spoke quickly, and for once entirely without reserve. "It will never again be a case of 'if it were not for me.' I am going to look after you, even if it has to be from a distance. I hope not, I think I am man enough for that to be unnecessary. But you will not be left alone again. To me your impulsiveness and your courage are both beautiful, part of you; I would not have them altered. But . . . they are dangerous; there are always precipices, quagmires, crevasses. . . ." He had been serious long enough. "You're a born blunderer, you know," he said, but his eyes were tender. "Don't do anything foolish in Rome. I'll be there as soon as possible."

"Have you got everything?"

The whistle sounded, the flag waved, the train moved off.

CHAPTER XXXI

SHE was to travel all night and be at Genoa in the morning. The next evening she would be in Rome.

It was a corridor train; the compartment, which she, with the baby and nurse, was to occupy, waking or sleeping, during the next twenty-six hours, contained only three seats. Nurse was in a condition of offended dignity, having been unduly, and, to her mind, needlessly, hurried. She intruded her sense of responsibility, and spoke of the risk of moving about in winter-time with a croupy child. She would not allow the window to be opened. This circumspection, with which she could not quarrel, drove Manuella out of the carriage to where, on the narrow wooden ledge, miscalled a corridor seat, she was able to obtain the questionable advantage of a slight draught, combined with the soot from the engine. To be uncomfortable, however, suited her mood. Neither backward nor forward could she look with satisfaction. She had been a fool; her cheeks burned when she thought what a fool she had been. They burned, too, when she thought of Waldo. He had knocked Peter Graham down; to think of the reason of his doing so was impossible. Then there was her meeting with Harston to face. What would he say to her, how excuse himself? It would be horrible to hear him excuse himself, and to know how little she really cared. She would help him if he needed help, but it would be dreary work. But Waldo

would come soon . . . she ought not to dwell upon that. She sighed impatiently, watching the darkening panorama of the country, hating all that was before her.

A fellow-traveller, alone in the next compartment, occupied also with his own affairs, wondered idly why she sat there, and not in her compartment. Had she, too, lost everything at the tables? Was she travelling alone? But he was only vaguely interested; he had other things, more important, on his mind.

At seven o'clock dinner was served. Nurse was still sulky and said she did not want any dinner.

Having overcome the difficulty of progressing along the narrow corridor of the quickly-moving train, Manuella found herself in the sparsely-occupied dining-car. There was a married couple at the further table with a daughter almost as old as themselves; possibly English; a party of Americans, shrill and assertive; and there were two German *commis-voyageurs* in travelling *déshabille,* tweed caps and slippered feet, who looked at her with appraising eyes.

The waiter asked:

"For one?" and indicated a seat at the table near the door, where already there was another diner.

As the meal proceeded, she looked at her *vis-à-vis* with a slight curiosity, finding it difficult to guess his nationality. The black morning-coat and grey trousers in which he travelled showed he was not an Englishman, although they were English clothes; his fine and slender hands proved he was no German. Manuella decided this before the soup was served. She wanted to think of anything but that which was before or behind her. When he spoke to the waiter, ordering a bottle of Chianti and a Nocera, his bad French suggested he must be either Italian or Spanish. It was not until later that she learned he was a Sicilian. He was obviously uninterested in German bagmen and their wives, in shrill Americans, and provincial Frenchmen. He was abstracted whilst he ate his soup, making notes, or what looked like figures, in a little note-book. He had a new system to work out, one

that had only just occurred to him, and this time it was certainly an infallible one.

Before dinner was over, the infallibility seemed less certain, and, in any case, he did not propose to try his fortune again; he had, indeed, no fortune to try. Then he became vaguely aware that opposite to him was the girl who had sat so long on that uncomfortable ledge in the corridor, and that she was both young and beautiful. Sicilian ladies do not travel alone. Juan Orilia only knew of two sorts of ladies: those who travelled alone and those who did not. He was ready for distraction on the long journey before him; the steady purpose of his journey was not one upon which to dwell. He had none of those "resources in himself" which make solitude pleasant to men of greater intellectual endowment. He rarely read, and his imagination for many years had been limited to "runs," maximums, and combinations of numbers, concerned a little savagely, perhaps, about the cagnotte and the amount it absorbed, and always hopefully of a succession of eights and nines. He had a palate, and found the dinner served in the train inadequate to gratify it. He had also an eye—two, in fact—black, capable of softness in expression when they were not on a croupier or a *changeur,* the turn of a wheel or a card. Manuella decided, for one cannot help coming to some decision as to a man who sits at the same dining-table, that he would have been handsome if he had not looked so careworn, if his face had been unfurrowed. They were gambler's furrows, gambler's wrinkles round his handsome eyes; but she did not recognize this. She thought he must have had troubles.

"Mademoiselle is looking for something?" was the first sign that he acknowledged her existence. He spoke in French, but it was obviously not his native tongue.

"Only for the salt."

"But there is none on the table. If you will permit me, I will call the waiter."

After the opening the salt gave him it was easy to

ask if she had ordered wine, if she would allow him to suggest. . . . He had the manners of a man of the world. She had the manners of the world in which she had found herself since her marriage, the artist world. There was no reason she should not answer when she was spoken to, or even initiate talk. There was nothing of the "young man" about her *vis-à-vis;* it would have been difficult to see him as less than fifty years old. He had, nevertheless, an air of distinction, and seemed occupied with weighty affairs. Manuella, knowing nothing of zero, of *un après,* or of two *en cartes* following each other and upsetting all calculation, decided he must be a diplomat, an Italian statesman with the Vatican in his mind, or perhaps a republican politician concerned with the people's welfare. With such a one, since he seemed bent on making himself agreeable, there was no harm in discussing the food or wine in the express train, the weather, or the need of better ventilation for the dining-car.

"You have been at Monte Carlo?" was a more personal question. But she was prepared also to discuss the mountains and the blueness of the sea.

"And what sort of luck did you have?" was unexpected and needed explanation. It was with difficulty she made him believe she had never played a sou, never been inside the rooms. The rest of the dinner-hour was spent in an endeavour to explain to her all that she had missed. He said that he wished he had had an opportunity of meeting her there, of initiating her. He spoke of the proverbial luck of the novice, and was genuine in his regret that he had had no opportunity of exploiting it. She was really quite attractive, and although he had little time for women nor inclination, during the next few hours there would be nothing better to do.

It was not until the end of the meal that he became aware that she was not travelling alone, that she had not only a nurse but a baby with her. A compliment or two, and a suggestion that she might care to sit in his compartment in preference to the corridor, met with a reception that persuaded him his first impression had been a

mistaken one. He was really a gentleman except in money matters. Manuella said she had no thought of returning to Monte Carlo.

It did not seem indiscreet to tell him she was going to Rome for the production of her husband's opera, *Il Traditore*. She was surprised at the interest he took in the news.

"So he is your husband! Harston Migotti is your husband!" He was silent after that, silent for quite a long time.

"And are you, too, musical?" he asked, when he could no longer be silent.

She answered that she sang a little; hesitatingly, with a smile, she admitted she had once sung in opera. He did not requite her confidence with his own; he was not proud of being the husband of Madame Alma Orilia. But he was very much interested to know that this was the wife of the composer of *Il Traditore,* the man whose name had been coupled with that of Alma Orilia, his own wife, on whose account he was now travelling to Rome. He thought he knew now why she looked unhappy.

"She is a devil, that wife of mine," he thought; "a devil!"

When Manuella went to her *coupé-lit* after dinner was over, the *coupé-lit* she shared with the nurse and baby, she was still in ignorance of the identity of the gentleman with whom she had shared the dinner-table.

She was disappointed at the narrow insufficiency of accommodation on the sleeping-car, and decided on occupying the lower bed. Nurse clambered into the top berth with baby in her arms, and Manuella, partly undressed, set herself to sleep as well as she was able on the shelf beneath. She had tried, by talking to her fellow-traveller, to relegate to the background of her mind all perplexity and troubled thoughts, but they thronged back to her now. To the accompaniment of the throb of the engines, the occasional long-drawn shriek of the whistle, her restless mind looked back into the past

and pursued the future. What would have happened if Waldo had not come to the villa? Nothing would have happened; of course, nothing would have happened. But on that which it was difficult to believe, it was impossible not to dwell. She turned uneasily on her narrow bed and went off on another track. Waldo had neither forgotten nor neglected her. He had sought out Harston. She wondered what had happened between them; why Waldo thought she ought to be with or near him; what Harston had telegraphed? Had she been a good wife to him? Can you be a good wife to a man you do not love, but must criticize? If she had married Waldo . . . It was not possible to get comfortable in such a bed, nor to sleep. How long the night was going to be!

The light was obscured by a dark green shade; if she moved the shade she could read. She had a book somewhere; Waldo had put it in at the last moment; but if she got up, turned up the light, and moved the shade, nurse would sulk. She would lie still, think of nothing, count sheep going through a gate, force herself to sleep.

She had almost succeeded, notwithstanding the shriek of the engine, the iron rattle of wheels on the rails, the creak of the couplings. She had left off hearing noises, counting sheep; her brain was relaxing, vaguely drifting to drowsy silence, when she was brought back abruptly. Someone was knocking, knocking at the door of the compartment; she sat up to listen. There was no doubt about it; rattling as well as knocking. She called out:

"Wait a minute."

Whilst she slid out of bed, and sought for her slippers, she wished whoever was knocking would be more careful, and speak low to avoid waking baby. It was probably for the examination of the luggage.

The conductor of the sleeping-car stood at the door, without his distinctive cap, with alarmed face and tongue so agitated that it was difficult at first to understand what it was he wanted of her. His French was quite

fluent, but he was a Swiss, and in his agitation he spoke a *patois*.

"Madame will be so good . . . Madame has with her a *sœur de charité*. There is no doctor on the train. A gentleman in the next compartment has been taken ill; if there is no help for him he will die. If madame would spare her *sœur de charité*. . . ."

The nurse's dress had misled him; she was not a *sœur de charité*, she was an English hospital nurse, with an uncertain temper.

"I don't know if she would come. . . ."

Manuella was doubtful, but, fortunately, nurse woke up at this juncture and agreed, if Manuella would stay with the child, to see whether there was anything she could suggest.

"Come back and tell me. . . ."

They were already out of hearing, and she was left alone—alone with the sleeping child. She knew it was the man with whom she had talked at dinner that had met with an accident. She pictured him in the next compartment, dying perhaps. She wished she could have been of use. She hated sitting here doing nothing, waiting; the noise of the train speeding through the night and the darkness made everything worse. She groped for her clothes, dressed as well as she was able, and waited again. It seemed a long time before anyone came. Then it was the conductor.

"She says will you come? She wants to get back to the baby; it is not, after all, so bad."

Manuella went with him gladly; anything was better than sitting with her thoughts.

"What was it?"

"He has cut himself."

At first she thought he must have tried to commit suicide, tried, and succeeded!

The narrow compartment was full of the scent of blood, through the open window was a rush of cold air, and the light flared and flickered from the broken lamp. There was glass on the floor, and blood, everywhere

blood; nurse's dressing-gown was stained with it, also her hands, and there was a smear of it on her face. Only one bed was made up in this compartment; on it there lay the moaning man. A bandage was on his head, already dark with a darkness that spread; but it was the smell of the blood that made her feel faint and sick.

"What is it? What has happened?"

It was only an accident. Nurse and the conductor explained that the broken glass of the lamp was responsible.

"He must have struck his head against it when he stood on the bed and reached to put up his bag. But it was lucky I heard and came in. He would have bled to death! *Mon Dieu!* how he bled!"

The broken glass had cut an artery. Nurse had bound it up, but not before a great deal of blood had been lost.

"Someone must sit with him to see it doesn't break out again. I'm going back to my baby."

She may have meant she was going back to her bed. Accidents were not adventures to her, only ordinary incidents, and she was cold, wanted to get back.

Manuella, of course, agreed to stay. Why not? She could not sleep; he had sat at her table at dinner; she had, as it were, an acquaintance with him, and could not let him bleed to death. By this time there were other people in the corridor asking what had happened; dishevelled, cold, or frightened travellers, useless in their pyjamas and night-clothes. There was no doctor amongst them, nor anyone with knowledge of what were best to do. They glanced in and hurried away. They were anxious to avoid any responsibility, to get away from the dreadful sight. It *was* a dreadful sight; the blood had splashed everything—coagulated human blood.

Manuella, as they scurried away, thought it was fortunate that nurse had been there, and able to tie an artery. There came a time when she thought differently. For the present, she was quite willing to sit with the invalid, releasing nurse to go back to the child. It needed courage, she could sit nowhere that was not blood-stained;

every time the train jerked, it seemed the wound might reopen. Nurse went back to bed, the conductor to his post; Manuella said she felt equal to the task, and would ring if he became worse.

Left alone with the unconscious wounded man, she tore off pieces of her own underlinen to make fresh bandages; she got water and bathed his head, subordinating her dread and disgust to his need. Nurse had given her instructions, and she carried them out faithfully.

"Don't you let him move or stir. Get a teaspoonful of brandy with a little water in it down his throat from time to time. Cover his feet up as warm as possible. Change the bandage when it soaks through."

Whenever Juan Orilia opened his exhausted eyes during that long, endless night, it was to look into those he had admired at dinner. She saw the recognition in his.

"You are not to speak. You are to lie still, and take the brandy I am feeding you with. You have had an accident, but you will soon be all right; the train is slowing down."

"A railway accident?"

"No, you must have been reaching up to put a bag or hat-box on the shelf."

"Oh, yes! I remember."

"You cut your head with the glass of the broken lamp, we think. You have lost a great deal of blood; it was an artery. But now it has stopped."

"It is very good of you to be here with me."

Gambler, *roué*, reckless and *décavé* though he might be, no one had ever found fault with Juan Orilia's manners. Those manners of his had captivated the less well-bred prima-donna ten long years ago, when she had made her *début* in Rome and been so proud of his attentions. It was the same story with Juan Orilia as it was now with Harston Migotti. He had not succumbed to her charms, but resisted them. Even in Rome one could gamble, and women were not nearly as attractive to him as the green cloth. She knew him to be poor, with impoverished estates, knew that the *trente-et-quarante* at Palermo

would complete what " The Travellers' Club " in Paris had begun. Alma Des Vœux was then at the beginning of her career, barely twenty. All the critics said that hers was the voice of the century; all Rome had gone mad over her, and she could have had her choice of lovers, even of husbands. Juan Orilia did not woo her passionately; he wooed her indifferently, or hardly at all. In truth, he could not make up his mind as to whether he wanted her or not. The gambler is never the lover. But his indifference or indecision made her certain that she wanted him. There were so many other men about her, and none of them were cool but Juan. She married him before his mind was really made up; he hardly knew how it had come about. She loved him violently for at least two years, and she cannot truthfully be said to have had much satisfaction for her love. Their quarrels began before their honeymoon ended. She was gifted with a grand voice, a capacity for acting, and a sense of music beyond what might have been expected. But socially she belonged to the lower strata of Neapolitan middle-class, and outside her music she had no education. He made her feel her inferiority. She loved him the better for this in a tiger-cat, inconvenient way. But she hated him also, at times, even more fiercely. In the end, their lives became a compromise. He was to be found in all the gambling centres of Europe, she in the Opera Houses of its cities. Each went his or her own way, yet the tie between them held. When the Prince Persipola had pursued her, to the scandal of Vienna, some four years after her marriage, Juan Orilia turned up cool and indifferent from Nice, and fought a duel with him. When Achille Bernheim, of Paris, made his attentions conspicuous, Juan came from Biarritz to persuade him that Paris was not healthy just then. And Achille Bernheim needed little persuading.

But this was in the past; everything was in the past now with Juan Orilia, excepting his intention to get even with his tiger-cat of a wife, and to prove to her that what he had threatened he would carry out. He had

written to her to that effect, and she had answered that he was mistaken, that Signor Migotti was in Rome with his wife. Now the lie was proved, for here was Migotti's wife; they had sent for her in order to deceive him. Well, he was not deceived. She was not fit to live, that wife of his; he would not leave her behind him.

All through that long night Manuella tended Juan Orilia, but he never told her his name. She sat on the little carpet-stool by his side, feeding him with the tea-spoonfuls of brandy and water, and changing his bandages. Every time he woke he found those dark eyes gazing at him with solicitude; they were sad eyes, and he thought he knew why they were sad. Once, notwithstanding her prohibition to talk, he asked her if she was going to Rome because she had tired of Mentone, and hastily she answered:

"My husband sent for me."

Of course, that was what he suspected; she was to be there for a blind, for his deception.

The long night dragged on. The train lumbered and jerked. When it was at its worst, she kept her hands upon the bandages, fearful lest the bleeding should break out again. But it was really only a superficial accident, and, when the artery had been tied, there was nothing to fear; the slight concussion was relieved by the bleeding.

All that night, growing stronger as the hours went on, and recovering from shock, Juan was conscious of her encompassing kindness. She fetched the pillows from her own bed to supplement his. About four in the morning, he told her she could safely leave him. He said he could not thank her adequately. She replied that she wanted no thanks, anybody would have done as much as she. She said she would not leave him, for the wound might reopen; she could sleep as well sitting up here as lying down in the next compartment. Then she gave him a little more brandy and water, and, as nurse had suggested, put a hand on his pulse.

"It is really getting stronger."

" I know, madame. You can safely leave me."

" Hush! It is I who am the nurse, and so must judge." She smiled down on him. Only that lingering sense of chivalry had made him bid her go. He wanted her to stay. He had his countrymen's nervous organization, and dreaded solitude in his weakness. He only slept because he knew she was there watching.

Before morning there dawned in his somewhat callous heart something that softened and altered it; not vitally, because at fifty neither a man's heart nor his nature changes vitally, but temporarily. And dawn in the east is red. Before, he had been thinking only of his own wrongs; now he thought also of hers. This girl had given up her night's rest for him.

" I am really better now; let us talk a little," he said later on, when it was full daylight. Soon they would be in Genoa.

" I don't think it will be very good for you," she answered doubtfully. She was really getting sleepy, and had difficulty in suppressing her yawns. She could see for herself now that she was no longer needed, but held her post until she should be relieved.

" I feel like Casabianca," she told him; and then had to explain " The boy stood on the burning deck."

" I am going to ask you a strange question, the strangest possible question."

" I shouldn't if I were you."

That is what Waldo would have said, she knew it as she uttered it; if they had married she would have grown like him. She was very sleepy, losing control over her thoughts.

" Are you unhappy? "

Juan Orilia raised himself on his elbow to ask her; and she was alarmed lest the bleeding should break out again. But he would not be put off, repeating his question.

" Is anybody happy? "

She evaded a more definite answer when it seemed that he would not be put off. He lay without speaking

after that, and she thought he slept again. She very nearly dozed off on that uncomfortable carpet-stool, but came to herself with a start.

"Is it about your husband and Alma Orilia you are distressed?" She had come to herself with a start, but now was broad awake.

"Who are you? How do you know? How on earth do you know?"

"You are going to Rome to join him, because they have sent for you?"

"Yes! But who are you? what are my affairs to you? No, don't move." And again her hand was on the bandage.

"I am Alma Orilia's husband."

He had been a patient, hardly a personality; her care for him had been an instinctive, not a reasoned, labour. Now she stared at him. Juan Orilia—Alma Orilia's husband!

"She shall not make you unhappy," he said. "Go now, but be content. You shall not always be unhappy. Leave everything to me."

CHAPTER XXXII

THE rest of the journey was blurred with fatigue. Baby was fretful and nurse irritable. Manuella might have slept, but between them they made it impossible.

They reached Rome at six o'clock in the evening. It was raining, and on the wet and dismal platform were *facchini* with their monotonous cries, the glimmering lamps shone on shivering, impatient passengers. She looked up and down, bade nurse stand by the luggage, and went outside the station. Here, notwithstanding the rain, it was brilliantly alight, and she could see the large buildings opposite, the broad road, the waiting lines of carriages and cabs, omnibuses for luggage; but she could not see Harston Migotti. Waldo had telegraphed that she was coming, but her husband had not come to meet her. She was alone, sick with fatigue and the depression of it, heart-sick, too.

Going back to where nurse stood beside the luggage, with baby in her arms and disapproval on her countenance, she was accosted by one of the men labelled "*Interprète,*" and wearing a "Cook's" band round his hat. He spoke interpreter's English, barely comprehensible, and his other languages were little better. Still she made out that he was asking her if she was Madame Migotti. When she replied affirmatively her immediate troubles

were over. The man was fully instructed; there was a cab waiting for her; rooms had been engaged.

That night she was too tired to ask from whom his instructions came. The rooms to which he took them were in the Piazza Barberini, large and airy, but to English eyes comfortless, one room opening into another, without privacy or warmth. Waldo had engaged them before he left Rome; the telegram to Cook's was an afterthought. He had done everything possible; foreseeing that her husband might be too much occupied to meet her. That Alma would make it impossible, contrive and intrigue that she should go without this attention, he may also have foreseen. Manuella, after the first moment of disappointment, was too tired to care. All she wanted to do was to get between sheets and sleep off her fatigue.

In the morning she sent a letter to Harston, merely announcing her arrival. The answer came back quickly:

"Dear One, I will be with you as soon as possible; this is only to bid you welcome. But there are only three days more, and nothing is ready; I am almost in despair. Kiss my Siegfried for me. I am with you both in my heart."

It was true that everyone was working night and day, and, as is the way with theatrical enterprises, everything was behind.

At Alma Orilia's flat the confusion concentrated. From morning until night, for the last week and more, people had been coming and going, messages, telegrams, letters, flowers arriving, the telephone ringing, Stollmont rushing in and out, distracted. Now it was the scenery, and now the costumes; always there were the artists whom nobody could satisfy. At the last moment, Fadini, who was playing Paulinus, threw up his part. De Ochoa, who replaced him at a moment's notice, had to be rehearsed privately as well as on the stage. It was difficult music—how difficult only the orchestra knew. But after three weeks with Migotti there was not a musician among them who was not devoted to him and his music. The

chorus-master was another devotee. But for the choruses and the orchestra, and, above all, the great prima-donna, Stollmont's anxiety would have deepened to despair. As it was, he was secretly exhilarated, and only outwardly raging, gesticulatory and vociferous. The stage-machinery was elaborate, and three days before the performance still imperfect; an essential piece, only procurable in Paris, never arrived at all. There was no end to the mishaps, and no words of Stollmont's were strong enough to characterize the urbane slackness of the Italian workmen. He swore and raged in vain; confusion became ever worse confounded. The *première* was to be three days after Manuella arrived in Rome. Into those three days three months of work must be crowded.

So Harston told her, when at length he came, with disordered hair and wild eyes. He said he was glad she was here; he kissed her, and even the child, and asked if there was anything she needed. He looked hastily at her rooms, and said they were splendid, and Lord Lyssons had been clever in securing them.

"Shall I come over to the hotel and pack for you, and move your things here?" Manuella asked him. Hurriedly he answered that he thought it better, after all, to stay where he was until after Friday.

"I am nearer the theatre. Day and night we are rehearsing."

But day and night, too, he was at Alma Orilia's flat. Alma had heard no further from her husband after writing that letter in which she had told him that his suspicions were unfounded, anything he had heard unjustified, and that the composer of *Il Traditore* had his wife with him in Rome.

After she had written to Juan, and when Manuella was on her way to Rome, Alma Orilia's jealousy had flamed up again. She would hardly let Harston out of her sight. She could not do without him; every question must be submitted to his judgment. There were consultations with Stollmont, with Poliaghi, with chorus-master, carpenters, even gas-men. When Harston was not at the

theatre he was at the flat. The flat was near the Costanzi, and his hotel near both. All these things he told Manuella, but not that Alma Orilia was passionately jealous of his wife, and it was necessary, even vital, to keep her in good-humour. He would have told her even this if he had understood her fully. As it was, his idea was only to keep the two women apart until after the great event. What would happen then he had no idea, he did not wish to think. There were times when he adored Alma Orilia, those were when she was singing his music. There were times when he had no feeling for her at all, but something very like dread; those times when she made scenes, spoke virulently of his "drag of a wife," and showed her coarse vindictiveness. Because she knew how slender was her hold on him, she flaunted it for all Rome to see.

It seemed plausible that he should not wish to move until after Friday, reasonable even that he did not wish Manuella to be present at the first performance.

"I shall be more nervous if I know you are there," he said. But he meant that he could not risk Alma seeing her in the house. Once Manuella saw them driving together. Harston's face was alight, he was talking eagerly, and they were sitting very close. If she was depressed when she got back to her rooms, it was not on that account, but because she felt how useless she was here. She was doing nothing, making no effort, such as Waldo expected of her. Waldo meant her to fight this influence to which Harston was submitting. But she could not. What could she give him in compensation for Alma Orilia's glorious voice and power in the musical world? Nothing, not even love.

Juan Orilia had lost a great deal of blood; he felt weak, unfit, although not unstable for his purpose. He rested three days in a clinic, not informing his wife of his whereabouts. When he got better, and sat under the tree, near the gates of the Villa Medici in the Pincio, he, too,

like Manuella, saw her driving with Harston Migotti. He went there the next day, and saw them again. That was the day of the first performance of *Il Traditore*. He had meant to go to the theatre, but it was too late to secure a seat. He had, however, many friends in Rome, and could visit them in their boxes. On the great night he dressed quite carefully, dined well, and arrived in time for the Overture.

The Theatre Costanzi is bare and undecorated, it is not divided into stalls and circles after the manner of an English house; there are no velvet upholstered chairs, there is no luxury but the luxury of the performances. The boxes are built around the amphitheatre, and it is the fashion to pay visits to them, to pass from one to another. The one reserved for Royalty was little different from the rest. Juan Orilia finally found himself in the one opposite to this—the one belonging to the Marquis de Rudini, whom he had left behind in Monte Carlo. He was welcomed by the Marquis's son and daughter-in-law, who inquired after their father's health, and, glad of the latest news, detained him. He heard that great expectations had been formed of the new opera; that it was said the composer was the genius for whom all Italy was waiting. The secret of Migotti's birth was known, but he was an Italian notwithstanding.

"They say the music is worthy even for your wife to sing."

Juan acknowledged the compliment. He thought they, too, looked at him curiously, finding it, perhaps, strange that he should be here. In Rome a man's wife may have a lover, but not in Sicily. Certainly not the wife of a Sicilian gentleman. Rudini might have known that, he thought. But he made no sign. He sat with them and chatted, of mutual friends, the cold weather, runs at the Casino, the coming races.

The Royal party arrived punctually, the little bustle of their entry being soon quieted. Now they listened to the Overture. Everybody had come to listen. The papers had paved the way; critics, who had been present

at the rehearsals, or had read the score, were enthusiastic in praise. They said it was an advance on the best Italian traditions, that the music, passionate, precise, and profound, was of an enduring character.

From the opening the result was never in doubt. There were three acts and five tableaux, all of them spectacular and dramatic in the widest sense, the interest ever culminating. With the scena that signalized her first appearance, Alma Orilia, as Queen Cartismandua, captured and held the house; the whole of the first act was a sensation. After her second song there was a murmur among the audience as of leaves in an autumn wind. In the boxes one heard it said that nothing in modern music could compare in intensity with the Trio at the end of the act. The clapping of hands and *bravas* were as a tempest raging. The singers were called and recalled, and from the critics one heard *"E magnifico," "Un nuovo Maestro,"* and unanimous praise.

The second act was, if possible, more brilliant than the first; the sparkling opening chorus went to the head like champagne. It is unusual for such an audience to interfere with its own pleasure by premature tribute, but throughout there were indefinable approving murmurs; enthusiasm was pent up, to burst out in vociferous *bravi* and *bravissimi* and continuous clapping of hands.

The last act was introduced by a mournful orchestral prelude, a complete change of key. Men held their breath, *"Un trionfo!" "Un miracolo!"* One caught the words on moving lips. When, at the end, Alma Orilia sang the prayer cavatina as only she could sing it, the murmur and sound in the audience ceased as if automatically; they were spellbound. Then, whilst they were still breathless, came the wonderful quartet leading to the superb love-duet and the grand finale. The opera is now as well known as *The Chariot Queen*, but one has to remember that this was the first presentation.

The curtain fell, and an almost indescribable scene followed. Men stood on chairs, shouting themselves

hoarse; the noise reached the roof and seemed to tear it; again and again came that thunder and volume of *bravi* and *bravissimi*. Flowers were thrown on to the stage, and even jewellery.

The performers who first came forward were greeted tumultuously; it seemed as if there would be nothing left for the principals. The ladies curtsied and smiled, and were pelted with flowers. The gentlemen in their togas and filamented heads bowed and laid their hands upon their hearts, knowing they had been in fine voice. Stollmont had secured a truly wonderful cast. There was a furore of cries for Alma Orilia. "Orilia!" "Orilia!" they shouted, and presently Migotti's name was also heard.

Alma came on, and curtsied low; the curtain fell and was raised five separate times. She was before them deprecating, accepting, smiling at their applause, which again broke and reverberated like thunder. The sixth time she was seen holding the composer by the hand, indicating that it was to him the applause was due. She held his hand, and, all at once, impulsively, she kissed it! And that was wonderful to the excitable Italians, who responded with a sea of waving programmes and recognition.

When Juan Orilia saw his wife kiss the composer's hand before the whole house, before all Rome, he grew very white; when she let go his hand and made that low, sweeping curtsey to him, as if she would have knelt at his feet, he took steady aim. The Rudinis had left the box, and he was quite alone; the moved and shouting house was in semi-darkness, but the stage was well-lit. She had kissed his hands; now it seemed she would kiss his feet!

The aim was low, the report hardly heard amid the uproar. The moment the pistol went off, the second before, perhaps, Migotti had stooped to raise her. She was acknowledging his genius, telling the house the applause must be for him. He had bowed and smiled, and smiled and bowed, and even shrugged, for what more could he

do or say? In England he had been hissed, humiliated, neglected; but here in Italy they understood. This was his moment, the fruition, the acknowledgment of his work. Now he could afford to be modest.

"I owe it to you," he said low to Alma, who had interpreted him so grandly.

"I want not your gratitude, but your love."

Their simultaneous words were simultaneously arrested. The applause was for both of them, the shot for only one. Afterwards it was said that he saw the raised pistol, and flung himself in front of her. The bullet was not intended for him, but it was him it reached. The composer fell forward on his face; the great singer reeled, and would have fallen too. Stollmont was on the stage in an instant, horror and incredulity on his face. The curtain was quickly lowered.

For the moment no one in the house knew what had happened. Then there was another shot, or was it a click? . . . The applause and clapping of hands died away suddenly. Now the house was full of fear, gripped and paralysed, silenced with fear.

"Una Bomba, Una Bomba!"

There was no doubt the detonating sound was a bomb. A cold shiver went through the audience.

An hysterical voice shrieked *"La Reina!"* and a more terrible hush fell, an instant's hush, full of horror and dread. There was the sound of sobbing, of a passionate sobbing. Before anyone knew or understood, in that hush behind which one heard sobbing, there came the hurried entrance of the heavy-footed Carabinieri in their black uniforms with the red facings, the white shoulder knots conspicuous in the gloom. All at once, panic seized the still darkened house, unreasoning, unreasonable panic, and the word "bomb" came in hoarse whispers from choked throats through whitening lips. Pelting, hurrying feet, pushing, struggling people, groans and terror, and always the recurring phrases:

"The Queen has been assassinated."

"Someone threw a bomb. . . ."

Two had already exploded, there would be others. . . . "Run, run, *run*. Get out of the burning house."

The house, of course, was not burning at all, but quite safe and solid. *If* the curtain had been left up instead of being so quickly lowered; *if* the orchestra had played; *if* someone had had the presence of mind to turn up the lights, what followed might have been averted. But it was in semi-darkness and silence that men trampled on each other, on the women, only frantic to get out, to get away, that chairs were overturned, impeding the way to the inaccessible exits. . . . Already the audience had been overwrought, now they were quite without reason.

"Ha assassinato la Reina!"

"Il Re è morto!"

"Una bomba!"

"La Camorra!"

Before order was restored, before the lights were turned up, or the soldiers summoned, the theatre surrounded, and the truth known, before it was realized that there was neither bomb nor fire, the disaster had come about. The stampede, cyclonic and irresistible, sweeping fainting women from their feet, crushing and trampling upon them, carried death in its onrush. Long will the first night of *Il Traditore* be remembered in Rome. The news of the panic was flashing along the telegraph wires before the news of the overwhelming success of the opera had been cleared from the line.

PANIC AT THE FIRST PERFORMANCE OF "IL TRADITORE." MANY LIVES LOST.

There were not many lives lost, but many women were injured, and one child was suffocated. A dozen rumours were afloat, none of them touching the truth. It was midnight before the reporters had got to work, and the headlines had been corrected.

MURDER OF THE YOUNG COMPOSER.

SUICIDE OF THE MURDERER.

DRAMA OF LOVE AND JEALOUSY.

There had, of course, been no bomb, nor attack on the King and Queen of Italy. The Camorra was not responsible for the catastrophe, only the Latin temperament. The King and Queen had left before the applause changed to panic with such appalling and dramatic suddenness.

There was tragedy behind the curtain, tragedy in the private box, where Juan Orilia lay with a bullet in his brain and the smoking pistol still in his dead hand.

But far more poignant was the tragedy in that *appartamento* in the Piazza Barberini where Manuella, waiting to hear the news of his triumph, heard instead the tramp of the bearers who brought her young husband back to her to die.

CHAPTER XXXIII

WHEN the truth was known, a chorus of pity and imprecation broke out. There was bound to be an objective for it, since Juan Orilia was dead, and Harston Migotti dying. Not admiration but execration now greeted the name of Alma Orilia, for whom the bullet was intended that brought down the composer of the finest opera that had been heard in Italy within the memory of man.

The whole story was in the *Fanfulla* the next morning, contradicted in the *Capitale,* and confirmed in the *Civiltà Catolica,* with appropriate comments. It was, after all, a love story, owing to which twenty-seven men and women, who had had no concern in it, were in hospitals or nursing homes. Juan Orilia had perished by his own hand, and in the house in the Piazza Barberini, where two Carabinieri stood at the door, and doctors went in and out, while reporters waited for any scrap of news borne by hushed voices, lay Harston Migotti, the great composer of *The Chariot Queen* and *Il Traditore,* shot through the lung, bleeding internally. There was no hope that he would live through the day; his wife was with him, and there was a child too! The great soprano was understood to be prostrate with grief. But it was understood also that the authorities had already advised her that the sooner she recovered from her prostration and left

Rome, the sooner would their anxiety on her behalf be allayed.

There are so many ways of telling a story; there were papers less reputable than the *Fanfulla* and the *Capitale,* less restrained than the *Civiltà Catolica.* The *Diritto,* for instance, and the *Tribuna,* might seize on the opportunity and attack the Government that permitted Alma to remain. The *Rugantino* might be expected to make fun of the events, lewd and tragic fun, that would rouse the populace against her more surely than a serious attack. Certainly Rome was no place for Alma Orilia in the first days after the calamity at the Costanzi Theatre.

It is not, however, with her that this story concerns itself. She was smuggled safely out of Rome, and has not sung there again, nor is she ever likely to. But in America, when the story arrived in a garbled version, it was believed to be a great " scoop " or asset, and was responsible for the enormous fee Stollmont was able to secure for her in the ensuing spring.

In the Piazza Barberini, Harston Migotti lay on Manuella's bed, very pale, past hope, almost past speech, waiting for the end. At first they were for carrying him to the Ospedale; it was he himself who had given them the direction here, where his young wife received him in the small hours of that incredible night, and instead of wailing, as an Italian woman would have done, showed herself cool and practical, astonishing bearers and doctors and hurriedly-summoned nurses.

" It is over," was what Harston said to her when they laid him on her bed.

She had no words for him, nor for the tragedy that had overwhelmed him. An agony of pity wrung her heart and overflowed her eyes. She was told of the great success, of the overwhelming applause.

" Ah! but you should have been there! " one of the bearers said. " Nothing has ever been seen like it. You could have heard the ' bravas ' two streets away, it was as if the roof must come off."

Recognition, applause, success had come too late.

At first she thought he would recover, that he could not be going to die; it was too cruel, too impossible! She had not loved him, but he was the father of her child.

"You mustn't die, I can't let you die!" she exclaimed, through her falling tears, passionately; "it can't end like this. . . ."

They examined and probed the wound, gave him opiates, then stimulants, but acknowledged they were helpless. After the doctors had gone he lay very quiet, very patient. He wanted Gerald Streatfield sent for. He never spoke once of Alma Orilia, for whom his life had been sacrificed.

Manuella, in that passionate pity of hers, without a thought now of herself, or that her name and the story of his faithlessness to her would be in everybody's mouth, leaned over and whispered to him:

"Do you want Alma Orilia? I don't mind. Shall I send for her?"

"I want Gerald." He had very little voice left.

"I have telegraphed, but he can't be here until to-morrow. Can I do anything; do you want to tell me anything?"

"I want someone who can write music. Listen! hush! see that everything is still. I hear them marching, marching. It is my coffin that is the head of the procession. And oh! such music! Write . . . *write.*"

He struggled to a sitting position, panting, filled with excitement.

"Write," he said again, and his lips parted as if he would sing.

"You have heard it, taken it down? . . ."

His eyes were lit up; harsh sounds now came bubbling through the gathering froth on his lips.

"How fine it is, how grand. . . . You hear it, you have written it down?"

Quite suddenly the light was gone from his eyes and they went dull and glazed as his head fell back. What he heard he took with him. Celestial music it may well

have been, and his soul escaped in the swell of its harmonies. For presently, as they stiffened, there was a smile on his dead lips.

Reverently the Sister, watching with Manuella, passed her hand over his eyes. With the smile stiffening on his lips he looked inconceivably happy.

Manuella, sinking on her knees, sobbing, said:

"I am sure he is hearing it."

"He is with the good God," the Sister answered.

* * * * * *

Waldo was not there until the next day. Gerald Streatfield, broken-hearted, was in time for the funeral. All Rome followed Harston Migotti to the grave, and the prelude to the third act of *Il Traditore* was played as his funeral march. Gerald was always convinced that, had he arrived in time, he would have understood and taken down what Migotti had tried to sing. This he says in his biography, that all too short biography, in which he likened Harston Migotti on his death-bed to Mozart, and speaks of the Requiem.

Manuella cried from the day Harston died until after the funeral. Every hour it seemed sadder; she reproached herself that she had done so little for him, nothing at all for him; all her prayers and promises had been of no avail. He was too young to die. It seemed to her that nothing so sad had ever happened. She could only cry and cry. Waldo did not even try to comfort her; he knew it was too soon, and that he must let her grief have sway. Afterwards, when the time came, she would be glad she had been here. And there would be other things he might say to her. Now she could only cry for her young husband, and wish she had loved him better. The dead leave always this behind to deepen the well of tears and make more aching tender the heart. So many kindnesses undone, so much sympathy not shown, silences that now can never be broken. She could only

cry for all these, and cry, believing it would never be different with her.

After the funeral was over, the inquiry opened and adjourned, and adjourned again; after the papers had found other topics, and she was on her way back to England, she was still crying. The tears came now from a numbed heart, and a numbed brain. She was only a girl in her weeds, but so pale and forlorn of demeanour that no beauty of youth was left to her. It was difficult for her to get away from the Piazza Barberini; the time of her going was known, and emotional spectators crowded around and cried with her.

" Oh, la Povera, la poveretta! come l'ha amato! "

" E colui, ha amato un' altra."

" Oh, la poveretta, la poveretta! muore d'amore! " burst from pitying lips.

At the station it was even worse, a larger crowd, exclamations of pity, cries of sympathy, a woman darting forward pressed flowers into her hand. She was too blinded by her tears to see anything clearly, her sobs choked her thanks.

" Ed anche il bambino! che tristezza! "

It would have gone hard with Alma Orilia had she appeared at this moment; they would have torn her limb from limb. There were no hard words for Juan Orilia. Any Italian would have done the same; but it was his wife he should have killed. Curses were heaped upon her; a she-wolf of a woman. *" Maledetta! " " Infame! "*

* * * * * *

In Circus Road, Lulu Marston came to Manuella, who would see no one else. To Lulu she declared, between her sobs, that she could never get over it, but would cry all her life for the boy who had met death singing. Lulu knew better, but refrained from saying so, and let her cry in her womanly arms, telling her how good it was to die, having written *Il Traditore* and *The Chariot Queen,* and what Russell had said about it.

"What am I to do for her?" she asked Waldo.

"Give her time," was his sapient answer.

It needed time, that was all. But longer than either of them thought possible. Many months were to pass before even Waldo could reach the source of those tears.

"I could have done so much more for him. If I had stayed in London, been there when he telegraphed for me . . . if I had never gone to Mentone, or met Juan Orilia; if I had loved him better, or at all. . . ."

"He would always have loved music best," Waldo answered soberly, glad that at last she voiced her feelings.

He was very gentle with her, although perhaps it hurt him that she should cry so long for Harston Migotti. He spent hours at the house, playing with, or talking to, the baby, avoiding any reference to her future, which, at present, Manuella only saw in a penitent's cell, in which she would sit all the rest of her life crying for the husband she had not loved in his lifetime.

"You are glad at least you were with him at the last," he said to her one day. Harston had lain four months now in his grave in Rome, and spring was on the way.

"He only wanted Gerald."

"It was not your fault that Tommy Traddles was in England."

"Yes, it was—in a way, it was. I wanted Gerald out of the house; if he had been more with him, and known what was going on . . ."

"He would have made more notes."

The tone was dry, but he altered it.

"Grieve, if you must grieve." He went on hastily, "I know you must. Although, in a way, it was a fine death; he was at the acme of his triumph, saw the shot coming, and flung himself in front of her, gave up his life for the woman who loved him. But don't paint devils. Leave off reproaching yourself for what was no fault of yours."

"He did not love her. I asked him if he wanted to see her, to say good-bye, and he never even answered."

"Neither did he love you, little girl." He thought it

was time to say it. "There is no room for love in the life of a self-centred genius. You are going to be angry, I see that already. It is a long time since you've been angry about anything isn't it?"

"It does not make it any better because he did not love me," she answered forlornly, without the flash of her eyes, or the anger he expected.

"No, I don't suppose it does. But I thought I would remind you."

That was the first time since she had been free that their eyes met. Her eyes were dim with tears, but they were not too dim to see the kindness in his. He had waited long enough. It was time he asserted his claim that their eyes met. He threw an unexpected arm about her waist and drew her to him.

"Hush! don't struggle; you belong here, in my arms. Haven't they been empty long enough?" But she struggled against him.

"Don't! How can you! It isn't four months . . ."

"I am not guided by the calendar. I don't mean to let you go. I did it once before. . . ."

He was so moved, holding her in his arms, feeling her against him, sentient, struggling, that he was almost rude. "Look what a mess you made of things. You really can't take care of yourself, you know that."

"Let me go!" But her resistance was feeble.

"Not a chance," He kissed her hair, her eyes, the face she hid.

"I never make anything but mistakes," she burst out. "Look at Peter Graham. . . ."

"I would rather not, if you don't mind." He put a hand under her chin. "I would really rather look at you."

"I don't want you to look at me." Her face was hidden, more willingly now, on his shoulder. "I have grown old, ugly. . . ."

"Hideous, I know, I have noticed it myself. You will have to go in for face massage. Everybody's doing it."

" And there is baby."

" I really don't feel inclined to trust my godson with you any longer. You give him all his own way and spoil him frightfully. You don't think you are fit to bring him up without me to help you, do you? " His voice was low, and his lips against her ear; he was always a tender rather than a passionate lover.

" Do you think you will have finished all your crying soon? " he asked her presently.

" I shall never have finished."

" All right. But I am getting so damp. I feel it trickling down my collar; it is a lucky thing tears are salt, otherwise I should fear rheumatism."

She tried again to disengage herself.

" Don't be silly; go on crying if you want. I can always change my collar." Now he had her more comfortably in his arms.

" I am going to marry you whether you like it or not. You need not wriggle; I never supposed you would like it. But you must be kept out of mischief. What, more tears? The November floods are nothing to it. Manuella, little girl, little donkey! My God! how fond I am of you, although you are such a responsibility . . . and a termagant." His arms tightened. This time he kissed her eyes, found her lips too. " You have never really belonged to anybody but me. You are worse than the Inland Revenue in the way you are keeping me out of my own property. Lloyd George isn't in it with you. Kiss me, and say it is all right. You may cry again afterwards if you insist."

She made many protests, then and later. It was " too soon," and she " did not deserve to be happy," she had " no fortune, and he could not afford to marry her."

He agreed with everything she said, cheerfully. But he went on with his preparations exactly the same as if she had not spoken. It was true that they would have to live quietly; he was little better off than he had been two years ago.

"Of course, Peter Graham is much richer. . . ."

But that was a subject on which she could not bear chaff. When he found this out he pursued it; he liked to make her angry. It seemed like old times when her eyes flashed and she stamped her foot and said she would not allow him to mention Peter Graham's name. When they began to quarrel the end was very near. She forgot to cry for Harston when Waldo teased her and she got angry and argued with him. She had resented being treated as a child; now somehow she no longer resented it. She sought for causes of quarrel, so that they should make it up afterwards. He understood her so much better than he had done at first, better than anyone else had ever understood her. She was still a mixture of child and woman. But her pride no longer baffled him, he could banter and laugh at her. When she got to know how he loved her, to believe and rest in that love, a great peace fell upon her, a peace of the heart.

"I will try to be different," she whispered to him one day, after an exhibition of childish rage which he had very deliberately provoked.

"That is exactly what I don't want you to be," he answered, as she nestled in his arms. He laid his lips gently against her soft hair. "I have curious tastes, I like you just as you are."

"You don't want a wife who flies into ungovernable rages?"

"I do. I admit it is a strange aberration of mine. How soon are you going to gratify it?"

"You don't mean it?"

"I am not surprised you think so. No, don't hit me. . . ."

Her heart shook when banter became tenderness, when his lips strayed from her hair to her delicate ear. "Manuella, you dear little fool, you darling little fool; if you don't marry me to-day, to-morrow, at the latest within a week, I shall carry you off in an aeroplane, drop down somewhere on a desert island, where there is not a parson. . . ."

She said afterwards that he shook her and called her names when he asked her to marry him.

"I am not going to do without you another week. I am going out now to get a special licence. . . ."

"What a funny way to kiss me?" she said, a few minutes later. But he had felt the response.

"I suppose it was," he answered as coolly as possible under the circumstances; "let's try again. . . ."

* * * * * *

Lœtitia expressed herself shocked when she read that the Earl of Lyssons, with all his titles tacked on in the South African paper which recorded it, had married the widow of a musician, of Signor Harston Migotti!

"She has not been a widow six months! It is positively indecent, in such dreadful taste. . . ."

"He's a ripping good fellow, mater," Albert said.

"He is still the premier Earl of Great Britain," the half-paralysed Sir Hubert reminded her.

But it was because she had naturally a forgiving disposition, and not on account of her son-in-law's precedence in the peerage, nor of the letter from Lady Sallust, with the hint about a peerage for Sir Hubert, that made Lœtitia write to her stepdaughter. She wrote quite warmly, and said that she was glad to say Sir Hubert, under Providence, was progressing towards recovery and that (P.G.) they would be in London in time for the season. Stone House would be reopened.

To Lord Lyssons she wrote also:

"Sir Hubert wishes me to say that he has not made any different disposition of his fortune. The arrangement originally contemplated will be confirmed. As far as Manuella herself is concerned, I am sure this will all have been a lesson to her. We are quite ready to overlook the past, to let bygones be bygones, to receive her as

if nothing had occurred, to look upon her escapade as merely a girlish indiscretion. . . ."

"When they do get that peerage I suppose they will call themselves Lord and Lady Cliché," was Waldo's comment. He was then on his honeymoon, and not even Lœtitia could ruffle him.

FINIS

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"We welcome on behalf of the reading public this version of the great Russian novelist's work," writes the *Literary Digest* upon the publication of *The Brothers Karamazov*, the first of this new series. "We call attention," the *Literary Digest* continues, "to the excellence of Constance Garnett's translation. She seems quite to enter into the spirit of the original." Commenting on this same point, the *Providence Journal* says, "When it was announced that Mrs. Garnett had undertaken the translation of Dostoevsky, the news filled lovers of Russian literature with rejoicing. There could be no doubt that no living translator was so well fitted as Mrs. Garnett to perform this much needed work, and certainly in no other way could the discussion of Dostoevsky's greatness be better settled than by giving the public a chance to read in a translation as close as possible to the spirit of the original all the works of this extraordinary and ill-regulated genius."

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